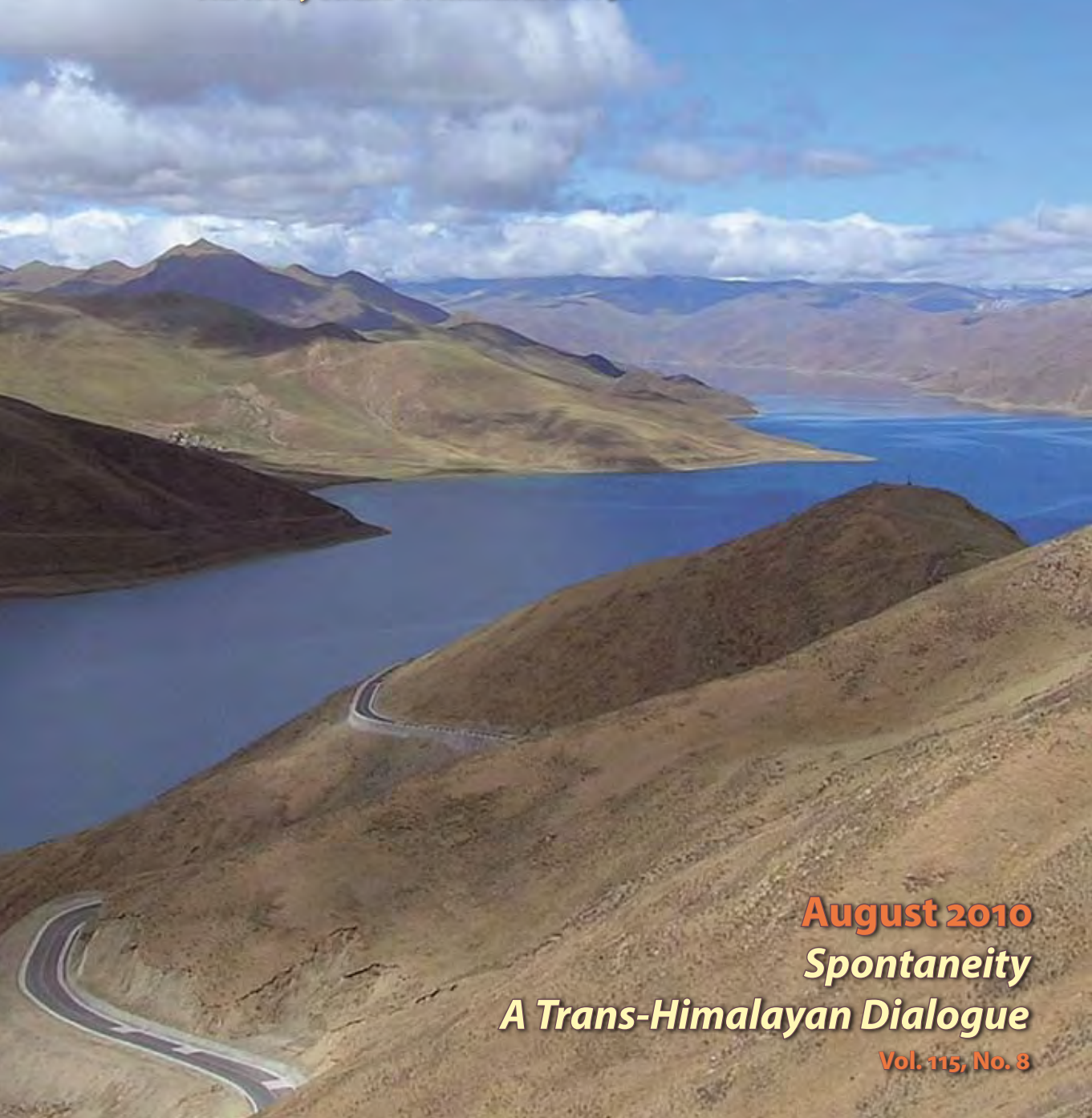


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**or AWAKENED INDIA**

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
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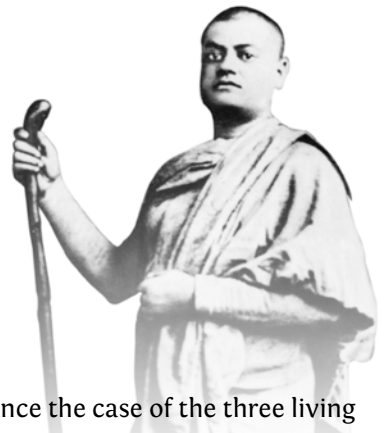


**August 2010**  
**Spontaneity**  
**A Trans-Himalayan Dialogue**

**Vol. 115, No. 8**

# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING-2*



**F**IRST, we have to understand that there are not any good qualities which are the privileged monopoly of one nation only. Of course, as with individuals, so with nations, there may be a prevalence of certain good qualities, more or less in one nation than in another.

Either in obedience to the Law of nature, or by virtue of the superior genius of the great ones, the social manners and customs of every nation are being moulded into shape, so as to bring that purpose to fruition. In the life of every nation, besides that purpose and those manners and customs that are essentially necessary to effect that purpose, all others are superfluous. It does not matter much whether those superfluous customs and manners grow or disappear; but a nation is sure to die when the main purpose of its life is hurt.

When we were children, we heard the story of a certain ogress who had her soul living in a small bird, and unless the bird was killed, the ogress would never die. The life of a nation is also like that. Again another thing you will observe, that a nation will never greatly grudge if it be deprived of these rights which have not much to do with its national purpose, nay, even if all of such are wrested from it; but when the slightest blow is given to that purpose on which rests its national life, that moment it reacts with tremendous power.

Take for instance the case of the three living nations, of whose history you know more or less, viz. the French, the English, and the Hindu. Political independence is the backbone of the French character. French subjects bear calmly all oppressions. Burden them with heavy taxes, they will not raise the least voice against them; compel the whole nation to join the army, they never complain; but the instant anyone meddles with that political independence, the whole nation will rise as one man and madly react. ... He must suffer who will try to interfere with this freedom.

In the English character, the 'give and take' policy, the business principle of the trader, is principally inherent. To the English, just and equitable distribution of wealth is of essential interest. The Englishman humbly submits to the king and to the privileges of the nobility; only if he has to pay a farthing from his pocket, he must demand an account of it. There is the king; that is all right; he is ready to obey and honour him; but if the king wants money, the Englishman says: All right, but first let me understand why it is needed, what good it will bring; next, I must have my say in the matter of how it is to be spent, and then I shall part with it.

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From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,  
5.456, 5.457.



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**August 2010**

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Amrita Kalasha

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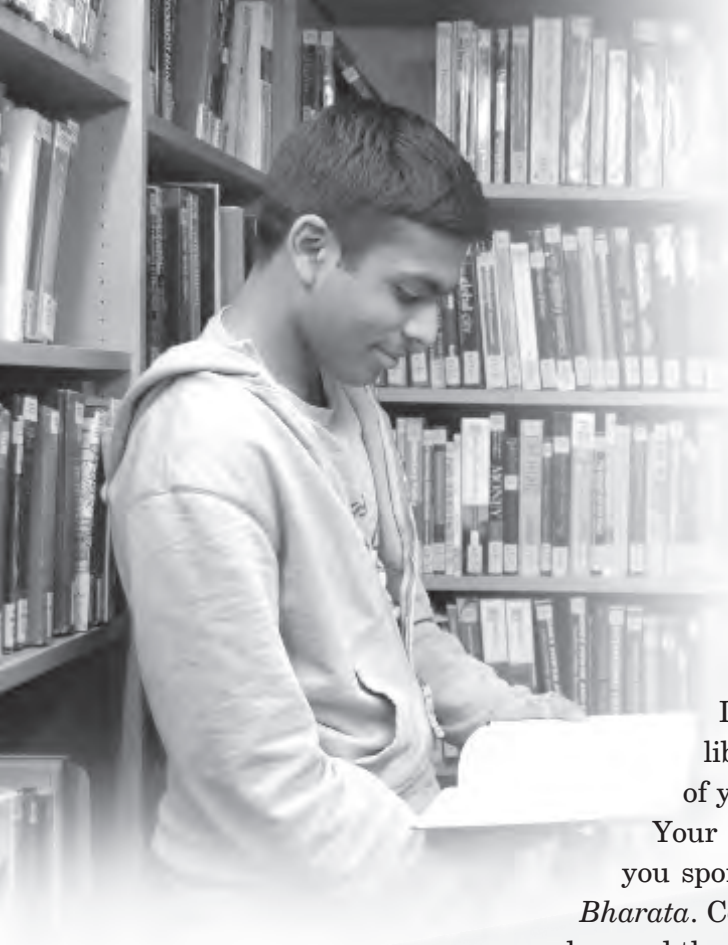
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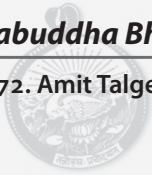
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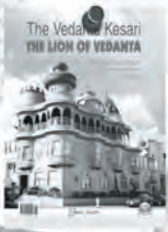
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## Goodwill

August 2010  
Vol. 115, No. 8

यत्प्रज्ञानमुत चेतो धृतिश्च यज्ज्योतिरन्तरमृतं प्रजासु ।  
यस्मान्न ऋते किंचन कर्म क्रियते तन्मे मनः शिवसंकल्पमस्तु ॥

That which is wisdom, intelligence, and steadfastness; that which is the inner immortal light within creatures; that without which no action is performed; may that, my mind, will what is good. (Yajur Veda, 34.3)

त्वज्जातास्त्वयि चरन्ति मर्त्यास्त्वं बिभर्षि द्विपदस्त्वं चतुष्पदः ।  
तवेमे पृथिवि पञ्च मानवा येभ्यो ज्योतिरमृतं मर्त्येभ्य उद्यन्त्सूर्यो  
रश्मिभिरातनोति ॥

ता नः प्रजाः सं दुहतां समग्रा वाचो मधु पृथिवि धेहि मह्यम् ॥

Born of you, mortals go about upon you; you bear bipeds, you quadrupeds. Yours, O Earth, are these five human (races), for whom mortals, the rising Sun spreads with its rays the light immortal. Let all those creatures together yield fruit to us; the honey of speech, O Earth, do you assign to me. (Atharva Veda, 12.1.15-6)

सर्वेऽत्र सुखिनः सन्तु सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।  
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिदुःखमाप्नुयात् ॥  
सर्वस्तरतु दुर्गाणि सर्वो भद्राणि पश्यतु ।  
सर्वः सद्बुद्धिमाप्नोतु सर्वः सर्वत्र नन्दतु ।  
दुर्जनः सज्जनो भूयात् सज्जनः शान्तिमाप्नुयात् ।  
शान्तो मुच्येत बन्धेभ्यो मुक्तश्चान्यान् विमोचयेत् ॥

May all be happy here, may all be free of illness; may all see the good, may none be afflicted by sorrow. May all overcome troubles, may all see the good; may all possess noble intellects, may all rejoice everywhere. May the wicked become good, may the good attain peace; may the peaceful be liberated of fetters, may the liberated free others.

मैत्रीकरुणामुदितोपेक्षाणां सुखदुःखपुण्यापुण्यविषयाणां भावनातश्चित्तप्रसादनम् ॥

Friendship, mercy, gladness, and indifference, being thought of in regard to subjects, happy, unhappy, good, and evil respectively, pacify the mind. (Yoga Sutra, 1.33)

# THIS MONTH

Though **The Indian Cultural Influence** is part of a global cultural web, it has some distinctive features that make it particularly relevant to concord and harmony. This number hints at some of these elements.

**Spontaneity** is a mark of souls centred in their true being; but it is a state difficult to come by. Swami Kritarthananda, a monastic member of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Society, Jamshedpur, discusses the characteristics, dimensions, and applications of, as well as impediments to, spontaneity.



In **Renewal of a Trans-Himalayan Dialogue** Dr Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty, Vice Chairman, Delhi Institute of Heritage Research and Management, New Delhi, takes a deep look at Swami Vivekananda's Advaitic vision as revealed in the prospectus of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, as he searches for remedies to the current civilizational crises within the numerous cultures straddling the Himalayas.

Germany has been taking important steps in reconciling itself with victims of the Holocaust. Dr Sandie Friedman, Assistant Professor of Writing, George Washington University, Washington DC, recounts her personal experiences of these efforts in **Berlin Story: Germans, Jews, and Forgiveness**.



The spirit of harmony and spirituality give the Indian cultural influence its unique flavour. This

is pointed out by Swami Ranganathananda, the thirteenth president of the Ramakrishna Order, in **Our Cultural Heritage**.

Dr Alan Hunter, Professor of Asian Studies and Director, Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Studies, Coventry University, concludes his exploration of **An Early World Wide Web: Religions of Eurasia** with a look at some shared key religious elements.

In the concluding instalment of **Koyasan: A Buddhist Pilgrimage** Dr Dipak Sen-gupta, former Chief General Manager, Coal India Limited, takes us through the heritage sites of Okunoin and the Kongobuji and Toji monasteries of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism.



In the tenth instalment of **The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta** Dr M Sivaramkrishna, former Head, Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad, shows us how the *samarasya* of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta helps balance divergent discourses and narratives.

Swami Prabhavananda, founder Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, continues his reminiscences of **Swami Brahmananda**, who lived in God.

The consciousness and 'cosmic ignorance' that mark the nature and powers of Ishvara are discussed by Swami Bhaskareswarananda, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, in the sixth instalment of **Vedanta-sara**.

# *The Indian Cultural Influence*

‘TO KNOW MY COUNTRY,’ wrote Rabindranath Tagore, ‘one has to travel to that age when she realised her soul and thus transcended her physical boundaries, when she revealed her being in radiant magnanimity which illumined the eastern horizons, making her recognized as their own by those in alien shores who were awakened into a surprise of life.’ Tagore was referring to the extensive cultural influence that India wielded over vast tracts of Asia since the first millennium BCE, the most remarkable evidence being provided by the countries of South East Asia, which some historians even chose to give the appellation ‘Greater India.’

Sylvain Lévi also noted the Indian contribution to global culture, more specifically to Asia and the countries on the Indian Ocean: ‘Mother of wisdom, India gave her mythology to her neighbours who went to teach it to the whole world. Mother of law and philosophy, she gave to three quarters of Asia a god, a religion, a doctrine, an art. She carried her sacred language, her literature, her institutions into Indonesia, to the limits of the known world, and from there they spread back to Madagascar and perhaps to the coast of Africa, where the present flow of Indian immigrants seems to follow the faint traces of the past.’

This cultural ‘giving’ had a very Indian flavour to it. As Swami Vivekananda observed: ‘Slow and silent, as the gentle dew that falls in the morning, unseen and unheard yet producing a most tremendous result, has been the work of the calm, patient, all-suffering spiritual race upon the world of thought.’ The early history of Cambodia—wherein ‘Indian influences were the most important’—is a case in point. These influences ‘coincided with the first centuries CE, when Chinese and Indian pilgrims and traders stopped along the coasts of present-

day Cambodia and Vietnam and exchanged silks and metals for spices, aromatic wood, ivory, and gold. ... Chinese writers testified to the extent of Indian influence in the kingdom [of Funan] and cited a local story, dating from the 6th century, that traced its origins to an Indian Brahmana named Kaundinya “who changed its institutions to follow Indian models”. One early innovation was probably the introduction of large-scale irrigation, which allowed people to raise three or more crops of rice per year in some districts and brought unpromising areas under cultivation. Another was the worship of the Hindu god Shiva, who was conceptualized as a tutelary ancestor or spirit of the soil and often was represented by a stone lingam. ... A third was the relatively peaceful coexistence of Hinduism and Buddhism, which characterized Cambodia for more than a thousand years.’

Between the fourth and fifteenth centuries Kambuja (Cambodia) had indeed been ‘effectively Hinduised’. Although very little of the literature of this period seems to have originated in this region, sophisticated Sanskrit inscriptions shed a wealth of detail on the local cultural life: ‘Princes were educated by their gurus in the Siddhantas, Sanskrit grammar (especially the *vyakarana* of Panini) the Dharmashastras and the six systems of philosophy. Shastrotsavas (literary assemblies) in which sometimes Brahmana ladies also joined and won admiration by their learned discourses [were common]. The Vedas were carefully studied. Daily recitations without interruption of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranas are referred to in a 5th century inscription. We hear of libraries well stocked with books on all Shastras.’

Similar processes were at work across the whole of South East Asia. A contemporary eyewitness

account of a small state—termed Tuen-suin by the Chinese—in the Malay Peninsula, provides useful insight into the dynamics of this acculturation: ‘Its market was a meeting ground between the east and west, frequented every day by more than ten thousand men, including merchants from India, Parthia and more distant kingdoms who come in large numbers to carry on trade and commerce in rare objects and precious merchandise. It contains five hundred merchant families, two hundred Buddhists and more than thousand Brahmanas of India. The people of Tuen-suin follow their religion and give them their daughters in marriage, as most of these Brahmanas settle in the country and do not go away. Day and night they read sacred scriptures and make offerings of white vases, perfumes and flowers to the gods.’

The process of Indian colonization of ‘Suvarnavdipa (Gold Islands),’ as the East Indies were termed in ancient India, was distinctly different from the violent and exploitative colonization that the same region witnessed in modern times. It was a strictly *cultural* influence, never a *political* one, as B R Chatterji has pointed out: ‘Throughout this period of 1200 years [beginning with the 1st century] at no time did any king or state of any part of India rule over any part of Indo-China or Indonesia.’ The Chola rule over Sumatra and southern Malay Peninsula in the 11th century may seem an exception to the above statement; but even this was preceded by friendly exchanges with the powerful Shailendra Empire and subsequent political disengagement.

It is true, as pointed out by K V Soundara Rajan of the Archaeological Survey of India, that ‘one of the most distinctive and edifying phenomena of the classical period, alike in Europe as in Asia, was that very large spheres of cultural influence were assiduously created, established and fostered, undeterred by the virility of any of these colonial zones, oriented as these influences seem to have been towards sophisticating and tempering the cultural slant of these autochthonous people. This “acculturation”, as sociologists might choose to call it, was not an imposition, but a dynamic reception to

ideas which were neither “sold” nor canvassed for.’ Yet, the way ‘the Indian heritage was imperceptibly blended with the local élan in South-East Asia, to enable it to become almost the common pool of ancestral heirloom for all these peoples’ should hold a lesson for us in postmodern times.

That the acculturation was as much due to assimilation as to infusion is suggested by the example of the Thais, who migrated into Thailand from the Chinese province of Yunnan in the thirteenth century: ‘Once established in the Menam basin, the Thai rulers set out deliberately to Indianize themselves. They sent, for example, agents to Bengal ... to bring back models upon which to base an official sculpture and architecture. ... Thai kings embraced the Indian religions, and they based their principles of government upon Hindu practice as it had been understood by their Khmer predecessors. Hence the Khmer version of the Devaraja cult was absorbed by the Thai monarchy; and traces of it survive to this day.’

It is also worth noting that in Cambodia, as also in Java and Bali, ‘Buddhism which reached from north India mainly, and Hinduism which was drawn from the south Indian kingdoms mostly, had themselves achieved a mutual fusion instead of supplanting each other or creating rivalry. Even the charters present invocations to Buddha as well as to Shiva; [the] Shaiva pantheon was itself amalgamated into the emanating scheme of the Dhyanī Buddhas. ... [The] Buddhist temple Chandi Kalasan resembles any other Hindu temple in Java. In Bali, some types of priests were even given the appellation *buda*.’

As Swami Vivekananda observed, the Indian message ‘has gone out to the world many a time, but slowly, silently, unperceived. It is on a par with everything in India. The one characteristic of Indian thought is its silence, its calmness.’ Transfer and assimilation of culture become truly fruitful when undertaken in an ambience of silent empathy and trust. In the furious cultural fusion pot that our globe is today, such calming influences are widely needed.



# Spontaneity

Swami Kritarthananda

**I**N EXPLAINING THE NON-DUAL PHILOSOPHY, exponents of Advaita Vedanta often posit the analogy of the ‘lost prince’. A prince gets lost from his palace at a tender age and falls in evil company. Neither he nor his new associates know his real identity. At last a courtier of his father’s palace rescues him and brings him back to a grand ovation. What happens to the prince? He simply regains his lost identity. In other words, he becomes what he already was.

Attainment of the non-dual state can be characterized as the ‘homecoming of the soul’. In a similar way, genuine spontaneity is the state of the soul that feels total identity with its higher dimension. Some people call this higher dimension ‘God’; others call it ‘super-soul’; yet others consider it the sum total of internal and external nature. Notwithstanding these differences of nomenclature, the fact remains that spontaneity is a state of the soul’s ‘at-one-ment’ with all of existence. It is the essence of the soul, not its attribute or quality.

A quality or attribute is like an appendage to the core personality. It is an abstraction ascribed to gross or material manifestations of the personality. The ability to sing is such a quality; so is writing talent. Body weight, complexion, facial features, and the like are also attributes that help us recognize people. Again, attributes imply possession, and possession gives one a sense of power. All qualities or powers are attributed to agents. Thus, agents come to be recognized by the attributes they possess.

But the case is different with spontaneity. It is an essential nature of the soul and not its attribute. The soul, the Atman, is an abstract entity that cannot be grasped by the senses or gross intellect. And the concept of spontaneity is also abstract. The two concepts are intrinsically and inseparably

connected, much like milk and its whiteness, fire and its burning power, the snake and its wriggling movement—just as Sri Ramakrishna would characterize the relation between Brahman and Shakti.

When in the depths of meditation the Self is stripped of all attributes, it recoils from its proclivity for objectification into a subjective state where the objective world connected to the soul vanishes and re-emerges as the soul itself. The soul then lives fully in the present, remaining in harmony with nature, which, it so realizes, is its own manifestation. All cravings of the heart stop, for in that state nothing remains to be desired.

The Atman is characterized as *sat-chit-ananda*, Being-Consciousness-Joy; therefore, spontaneity also has these three dimensions. But how do we recognize this absolute unitive experience in this world of diversity?

## Marks of Spontaneity

Spontaneity finds expression in innumerable ways. According to the Vedantic view, the Self is immanent in all Creation—sentient and insentient, manifest and unmanifest. It is not that all is part of the Self; rather, everything *is* the Self, and nothing other than the Self exists. This idea of immanence has been summarized in half a verse: ‘*Brahma satyam jagan-mithya jivo brahmaiva nāparah*; Brahman alone is true, the world is false, the soul is nothing but Brahman.’ Swami Vivekananda echoed this very idea in his beautiful poem to Mary Hale:

So Mary Hale,  
Allow me tell,  
You mar my doctrines wronging, baulking.  
I never taught  
Such queer thought

That all was God—unmeaning talking!  
 But this I say,  
 Remember pray,  
 That God is *true*, all else is *nothing*,  
 This world's a dream  
 Though true it seem,  
 And only truth is *He* the living!  
 The real *me* is none but *He*,  
 And never, never *matter* changing!<sup>1</sup>

Due to this immanence there is a ceaseless communion between the soul and the manifest universe—a communion that has its own language. A baby in the cradle is an example of this spontaneity. It keeps playing with itself, unmindful of the surroundings. Even older children are often seen to play alone and talk to invisible people when left to themselves. Children sometimes perceive the whole of nature as living. Sri Ramakrishna cites a vivid example:

At Kamarpukur I used to talk to Shibu, who was then a lad four or five years old. When the clouds rumbled and lightning flashed, Shibu would say to me, 'There, uncle! They're striking matches again!' One day I noticed him chasing grasshoppers by himself. The leaves rustled in the near-by trees. 'Hush! Hush!' he said to the leaves. 'I want to catch the grasshoppers.' He was a child and saw everything throbbing with consciousness. One cannot realize God without the faith that knows no guile, the simple faith of a child.<sup>2</sup>

The *Chhandogya Upanishad* narrates the story of the boy Satyakama, who satisfied his preceptor, Rishi Gautama, by his courage to speak the truth, albeit damaging to himself, when the latter made enquiries about his lineage. The sage accepted him as a disciple on the grounds of his truthfulness and sent him to the woods with a herd of famished cows. The disciple took up the job of looking after the cattle purely as a spiritual practice and kept his heart open with full awareness to receive spiritual wisdom. The burning faith and eagerness of the disciple fetched him the rarest of wisdom. It all came through his communion with nature. Some

animals and birds imparted to him the knowledge necessary for supreme realization.<sup>3</sup>

On the face of it, this story may seem absurd to rational minds. But a little introspection will reveal that if we can live in tune with nature, without being vain about our superiority or without animosity towards other beings, if we stand close by the river called life, which is in a flux, changing and renewing every moment, and can listen carefully to its voice without bias towards anything passing by, then we too will get the wisdom that came to Satyakama.

Several poets, philosophers, artists, and novelists are known to have had such profound experiences of oneness with nature, even though for a short while. William Wordsworth expressed this in his memorable poem *The Excursion*. The lives of Blake, Tennyson, Newton, Einstein, and other illustrious people testify to the truth that it is possible to live in harmony with nature and gain a rare kind of wisdom thereby. In his short novel *Siddhartha*, the German novelist Hermann Hesse has expressed in an idyllic style the natural transformation of consciousness followed by the supreme realization that comes to the hero, Siddhartha—a sincere spiritual seeker and follower of Buddha—in a life buffeted by ups and downs, billows and chasms. At long last, with a heart bereft of all desires, Siddhartha started listening to the communications conveyed by a river that became his constant companion. He started understanding the mute eloquence of the ever-dynamic river, which has no attachments—the river keeps moving perennially towards the sea, its ultimate destination. If one can shake off all the pulls of temporal attachment, one's heart gets tuned to nature's pitch, and then she reveals her secrets. This beatific revelation is succinctly captured in Swami Vivekananda's memorable poem 'In Search of God':

The moon's soft light, the stars so bright,  
 The glorious orb of day,  
 He shines in them; His beauty—might—  
 Reflected lights are they.  
 The majestic morn, the melting eve,  
 the boundless billowy sea,

In nature's beauty, songs of birds,  
I see through them—it is He.<sup>4</sup>

Far from being poetic imagination, such revelations have been coming down to us from generations past. The Vedic sages command us to realize this natural harmony—which they termed *rita*—and to live in tune with it. To live in harmony is life; to break this harmony, either intentionally or through callousness, is death. The Ramayana epic got a concrete expression after Valmiki witnessed the pitiable wailing of a poor bird whose mate was killed by a hunter, while they were engrossed in making love on a vernal morning amidst pulsating natural harmony. The cruel hunter could only break the natural harmony, while this very event induced the harmonious sage to bring forth his immortal epic.

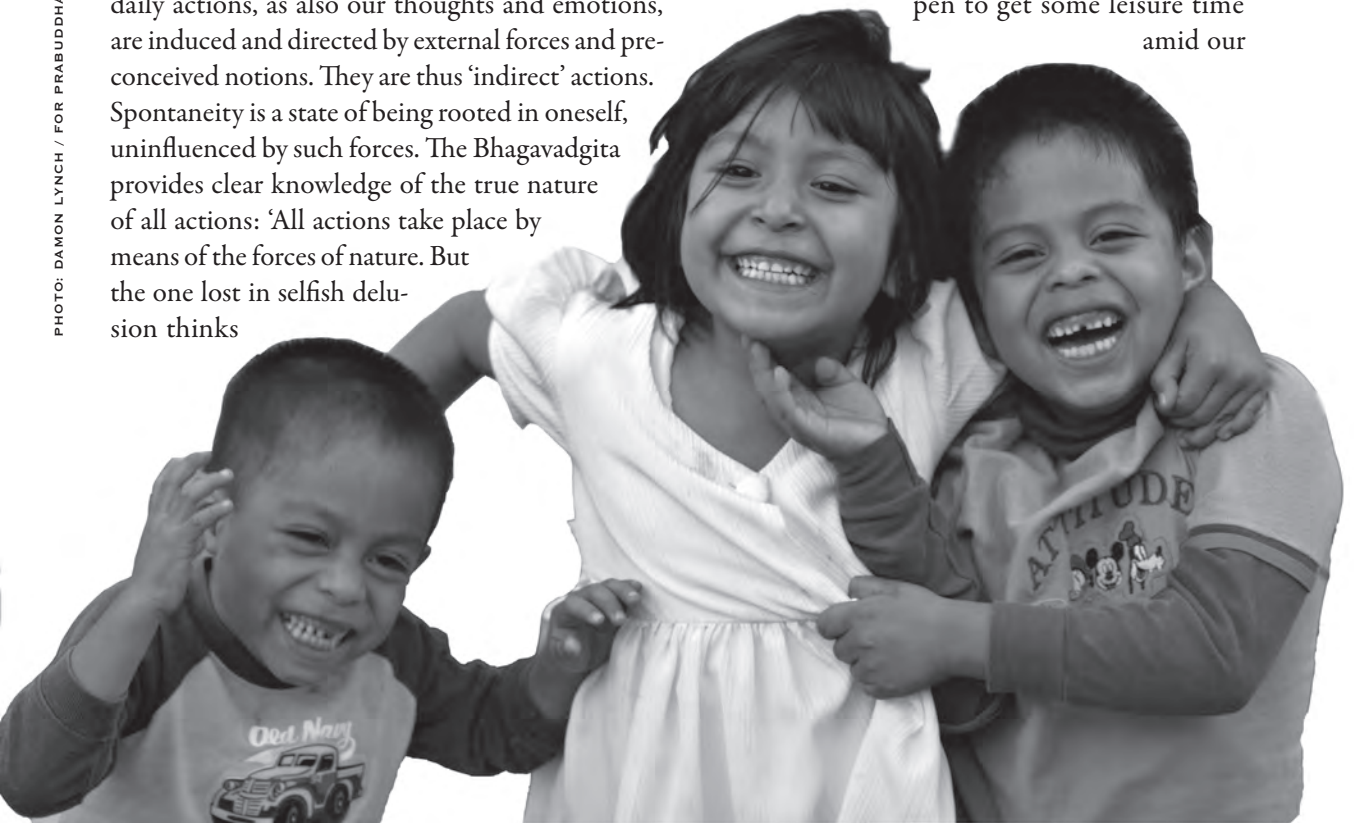
Spontaneity may manifest at any moment in life. When it comes, the person knows for certain that he or she is living in truth and is being guided by the truth of life. None of the faculties of thought, feeling, or action remain compulsive any more. Instead, they become self-directed, not propelled by any external force. Careful scrutiny would reveal that our daily actions, as also our thoughts and emotions, are induced and directed by external forces and preconceived notions. They are thus 'indirect' actions. Spontaneity is a state of being rooted in oneself, uninfluenced by such forces. The Bhagavadgita provides clear knowledge of the true nature of all actions: 'All actions take place by means of the forces of nature. But the one lost in selfish delusion thinks

oneself to be the actor. The knower of the relation between the forces of nature and actions sees how some forces of nature work upon other forces, and so becomes not their slave.'<sup>5</sup>

Spontaneity is thus a direct and immediate experience of an integral whole, of which one's own self is an essential part. It is distinct from the free expression of thoughts and feelings that come up from the depths of the unconscious to the surface of the conscious mind—the instinctual drives.

### **Dimensions of Spontaneity**

From the above discussion it may appear that spontaneity is just a passive state and hence has little utility in the workaday world. This is not true. As already mentioned, much of our lives are marked by compulsive or impulsive activities—we are either prodded on by outside agents or led by our inherent impulses and instincts. We take pride in claiming that we work deliberately, out of our free will; but the truth is that we are led helplessly by our own impetuosity, calling this our 'own work'. By conforming to the norms of the majority, of the group, of society, we become deaf to the inner urge of the soul. That is why if we happen to get some leisure time amid our



busy schedule, we become either confused or feel lonely. Why do we feel so? Because loneliness brings to light a void within, or brings to memory the forgotten faces of our own self. We always dread the images of our impoverishment, and the void is because we never get acquainted with our true Self. One whose personality simmers with spontaneity has nothing to worry about, wherever one be, in the busiest or the loneliest place in the world.

Spontaneity can find expression in two ways: actively and passively. The passive component is expressed in a state akin to meditation. Sri Ramakrishna named it 'open-eyed meditation', while Zen masters term it 'walking meditation', 'sitting meditation', and the like. The active aspect of spontaneity can act as an eye-opener for those who look askance at its utility. It has two important components: love and work. Most of us talk glibly on love, without knowing its deep implications. At the physical level love often gets mixed up with sensuality, sex, or attachment. Spontaneous love is not the dissolution of the self in another person, nor does it imply possessing another person. We even get heckled by our friends in the name of love. They may exploit our trust, and this hurts. There is more than a grain of truth in the following caustic prayer: 'Lord, save me from my friends, and I will take care of my foes.' Yet, we eulogize such relations terming them 'love'. Genuine love, on the other hand, is the spontaneous affirmation of others, the union of the individual with others while keeping one's individuality intact. The dynamic nature of this love springs from the need to simultaneously overcome separateness and maintain one's individuality.

In his masterpiece *Vivekachudamani* (Crest-jewel of Discrimination), Acharya Shankara has graphically depicted how this spontaneous love underpins the master-disciple relationship. Being plagued and scorched by worldly blows, the disciple, at the end of his vast study, takes shelter in the master out of a sense of helplessness and complete surrender; the master, an embodiment of compassion that he is, spontaneously showers on

the disciple the great assurance of fearlessness. The Acharya uses the term *sahasa*, spontaneously, to characterize the spring of love that pours out effortlessly from the heart of the master. This true love is in sharp contrast to our day-to-day love-hate relationships. Spontaneous love knows only how to give and seeks no return; nor does such giving exhaust itself, since this love cascades from a never-ending fountainhead.

Work is another component of active spontaneity. It is not the work done under compulsion or to escape loneliness, boredom, and monotony; nor can this work be compared to a saleable service or commodity. It is the product of one's inner creative urge. Such creative work, though by no means common, is responsible for the upkeep of one's true personality. Creative spontaneous activity is rare only because in today's money-oriented world it does not necessarily fetch money. An artist's work is valued if it fetches a good market price. This market orientation obstructs the flow of spontaneity. Creative self-directed work, on the other hand, opens the door of our 'inner chamber', and though in the beginning some of our shortcomings raise their ugly heads, we soon learn to accept ourselves and know for certain our true face. This acceptance makes our lives more real. We then stop posing as someone else. This masked living is a common problem. The major part of our energies is wasted in trying to prove what we are not, in masquerading as someone else, a pseudo-self. Creative work gives meaning to life. The creative personality finds meaning in the very act of living. Ordinarily, people are happy so long as they get their desired objects. That is enough to give them meaning in life. But when a huge wave from the ocean of worldly tumult hits at the roots of their very existence, this mundane meaning provides little solace.

Creative, conscious, self-directed work not only adds true meaning to our lives, it also helps solve existential problems and opens the doorway to the knowledge inherent in our being. When Acharya Shankara refuted the possibility of a synthesis be-

tween work and knowledge, by 'work' he meant the thoughtless machine-like repetitive work born of passions and drives, which, besides creating bondage, weans one away from Self-knowledge.

### **Spontaneity and Zen**

This idea of spontaneity is probably nowhere stated as expressly as in the Zen Buddhist tradition. Zen followers, especially in Japan, made spontaneity the very foundation of their philosophy and practice. Chinese Taoism advocates living in harmony with the Tao, the universal order underlying the universe. Taoists believe that continuous flow and change are the essential features of the natural order. There are certain patterns in this change, and enlightened persons recognize these changing patterns and direct all their actions in harmony with this change. Spontaneity is a direct consequence of this 'living in harmony with the natural order'.

Zen has made of this spontaneity a sadhana and a way of living. There are two principal schools of Zen in Japan: the Rinzai or 'sudden' school, and the Soto or 'gradual' school. Both the schools—more so the Soto—attach importance to *zazen*, 'sitting meditation'. This is to be practised everyday for hours together. Zen also asserts that enlightenment manifests itself in everyday affairs. This concept enabled the Japanese to bring all sorts of work—painting, calligraphy, garden design, serving tea, arranging flowers, martial arts, archery, judo, fencing, and the like—within the purview of Zen. All these acts can be done with spontaneity, simplicity, and presence of mind. For example, archery can be practised as a ritual by means of spontaneous and effortless movements. In this process, even the art of drawing the bow from the quiver is taught for years as a spiritual lesson. At the peak of perfection the bow, arrow, bull's eye, and archer, all merge into one, and the archer does not shoot 'intentionally', the process takes place spontaneously.

This elegant way of spiritualizing everyday life has earned worldwide popularity for Zen. The tea ceremony, garden landscaping, and martial arts, among other activities, provide scope for practis-

ing religion in and through every act of life. Like the proponents of Hinduism, Zen masters also look upon the polarities of right and wrong as merely relative entities, to be treated with indifference. If one wants to live in harmony with the natural order with a view to achieving the state of spontaneity, one must learn to go beyond the pairs of opposites and not cling to either of them.

### **Impediments and Applications**

The constant conceptualization that takes place in our minds impedes spontaneity. Since our childhood we are taught to think in certain fixed ways. The process is much like feeding a computer with a fixed set of data. The computer cannot 'act' or 'think' in any other way. Likewise, human minds also get programmed to act on a limited set of information only. That is why one who wishes to live in spontaneity must first set aside all preconceived notions that have been influencing one's personality. This is no mean task, but once it is done, living in the present is no more difficult. One must be able to stop choosing for oneself. We are often too vocal about our idea of duty or the sense of right and wrong. We hold fast to petty ideas, like children who refuse to part with their toys. But so long as we continue to live with such an inflexible mental bent, spontaneity remains an absurdity, or at least a far cry. According to the *Ashtavakra Samhita*, the idea of duty is like the scorching mid-day sun that plagues the soul.<sup>6</sup> Our pet notions are like the waves and bubbles that keep forming incessantly in a river. A river is an integral whole comprising the current, flow, tide, waves, eddies, and whirlpools. One who goes to swim in the river must be ready to encounter all these. Similarly, one who wants to cross the river of life must take in one's stride many conflicts, polarities, unexpected problems, and the like. Master swimmers never dread these obstructive waves; they know how to ride them with calm.

As already mentioned, spontaneity is an abstract concept. Its validity lies in its being achievable in life. Spontaneity is one of the hallmarks of


sainthood and a real test of spiritual realization, whatever be the religion one professes. 'Spontaneity' originates from the Latin *sponte*, meaning 'of (one's) own accord'. It indicates that the will of a Self-realized person becomes absolutely free, stripped of all biases. The Sanskrit equivalent of this term is *svatah-sphurta*, that which finds expression (*sphurati*) of its own (*svatah*).

Sri Ramakrishna's whole life is an ideal illustration of this concept. Right from his childhood he learnt to communicate with nature. His powers of impartial observation and analysis remain legendary. The beauty of a flock of milk-white cranes against the backdrop of a dark cloud sent him into ecstasy. He so completely identified with Shiva—the role he was playing in a village drama—that he went into samadhi. Truth, compassion, love, and such other traits manifested spontaneously in his person. He bore no malice towards those who troubled him; rather, he took shelter in the Divine Mother like a helpless child. The Divine Mother, in his eyes, was responsible for the spontaneity or perfect rhythm of the universe, and she could also break the rhythm at will. Hence, there was no reason to worry or fret.

During his preaching days at Dakshineswar people from all walks of life flocked round him. He never thought of himself as superior to any of them. Instead, he shared in their joys and sorrows. When mourners unburdened their agony, he narrated his own experiences under similar situations and hinted at holding fast to the only reality, God. Swami Vivekananda, who read the meaning of the great life that was Sri Ramakrishna, achieved a similar spontaneity in his own life. That is why he could smile at all the tribulations he had to undergo and say, 'I am glad I was born, glad I suffered so, glad I did make big blunders, glad to enter peace.'<sup>7</sup>

It would be pertinent to ask again: What changes does spontaneity bring to one's life? Spontaneity may not fetch wealth or material riches. But it does enrich a person from within. One gets back one's lost wealth and becomes one's original Self. With the dawn of spontaneity one learns to know

and accept oneself with one's capacities as well as limitations. Accepting oneself makes one's life more real and simple. For spontaneity to flow in and through the personality, simplicity—as distinct from sincerity—is a must. When we are given to spontaneous living, we find our life meaningful not only during periods of happiness, but also in suffering. As life has a meaning, so has death. If God is meaningful, so is the world, though in a wider sense, since it is pervaded by the Divine. As Sri Ramakrishna put it, to know the weight of a fruit you have to take the whole of it—the shell, the pulp, the seed, everything. But when you eat it, you eat the pulp alone.

Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter that though the Hindus may claim credit for arriving at Advaitic harmony and oneness earlier than any other people, yet practical Advaitism was never developed universally among the Hindus. That is why he proposed to bring Vedanta to bear upon everyday human life. When he spoke of abolishing all distinctions between the sacred and the secular, he meant to reify the idea of spontaneity. Only then 'to labour' will mean 'to pray', 'conquering' will be synonymous with 'renouncing', to have and to hold will become 'as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid'. All difference between service to humans and worship of God, between personal courage and faith, between righteousness and spirituality will vanish. The workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field will merge with the cell of the monk or the door of the temple as places fit for the soul's meeting with God. 

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# Renewal of a Trans-Himalayan Dialogue

Dr Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty

THE PROSPECTUS OF the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, was consecrated by Swami Vivekananda as a manifesto for the oneness of all beings. It is the coping stone of the mighty edifice of his thought. His works ring with the constant refrain of the Himalayas igniting the aspiration and exertion towards oneness. The journey to oneness, writ large on the physical and mental map of the Himalayas, has been disrupted by divisive human activity and reckless interference with nature. It is necessary to read the Mayavati prospectus into the future, in the light of Swamiji's works, to deal with the crises our present civilization is suffering. Mighty thoughts such as his, backed by great strength of character, may well, as he believed, cleave mountains, travel across centuries, inundate and rejuvenate a parched earth, and restore our moth-eaten times to health.

## ***Dualistic Contaminations***

In the Mayavati prospectus Swami Vivekananda expresses his wish 'to preach this Noble Truth [of oneness] entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness'.<sup>1</sup> He addresses the need for teaching and applying Vedanta after clearing it of the incrustation of scholasticism, in all its simplicity, beauty and sublimity, in the minutest detail of daily life (9.77). He is also explicit that ceremonials are unnecessary, because they are practised to get rid of something or to obtain something, which increases the idea of inequality and causes misery (7.37). The Advaita of the Upanishads does not make us dependent on books or teachers or prophets or saviours (8.523). Images and temples, practices and training are but rudiments, the kindergarten of religion. He hoped that the Mayavati centre would train children to worship God in Spirit and in Truth, to stand

## **The Advaita Ashrama, Himalayas**

In Whom is the Universe, Who is in the Universe, Who is the Universe; in Whom is the Soul, Who is in the Soul, Who is the Soul of Man; knowing Him—and therefore the Universe—as our Self, alone extinguishes all fear, brings an end to misery and leads to Infinite Freedom. Wherever there has been expansion in love or progress in well-being, of individuals or numbers, it has been through the perception, realisation, and the practicalisation of the Eternal Truth—THE ONENESS OF ALL BEINGS. 'Dependence is misery. Independence is happiness.' The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom.

Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it has not been more operative and useful to mankind at large. To give this ONE TRUTH a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expiration. Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practised nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone.

—Swami Vivekananda

fearlessly on their own feet, without depending on Christs, Buddhas, Shivas, or Vishnus (8.140).

Swamiji is emphatically clear: 'We are not individuals yet. We are struggling towards individuality, and that is the Infinite, that is the real nature of man. He alone lives whose life is in the whole universe, and the more we concentrate our lives on limited things, the faster we go towards death' (2.80). Our misery and fear arise from the idea of our separation from the universe and God, and this fear vanishes with the realization that we are one with the universe. Swamiji asks humanity to forsake the ideas of the family brother, the caste brother, the national brother as old superstitions, barriers to the realization of Vedanta, of the unity of existence in the universe (8.139).

He explains that manifoldness is only apparent. The human being is only apparently a person, though in reality he is the impersonal Being. The Satchidananda—Existence, Knowledge, Bliss Absolute—the fire of freedom and purity, is the nature, the birthright of every soul, present in the noblest as well as in the most ignoble manifestation. It has to be called out by the incessant assertion of unity of person and principle, in the same way as friction calls out fire from the flint and dry wood. Weakness and sorrow vanish as we give up the delusion of being bound: 'Dis-identify yourself with the body, and all pain will cease' (7.46). Unity and variation are intrinsic to the ideal of a universal religion. The same thing can be viewed from a hundred different standpoints, and yet be the same thing (9.495–6). God is both the material and efficient cause of the universe, both the Creator and the created; one, but differentiated in name and form (9.498). In the Mayavati prospectus Swamiji defines the nature of this one truth of Advaita: 'In Whom is the Universe, Who is in the Universe, Who is the Universe; in Whom is the Soul, Who is in the Soul, Who is the Soul of Man' (5.435).

In the prospectus Swamiji also states that Advaita is the only system that could bring an end to dependence and misery as well as lead to independence and happiness. It could extinguish all fear in

people and give them complete possession of themselves. It would make us brave to suffer, brave to do, and would help us attain, in the long run, absolute and infinite freedom. The perception and practical realization of Advaita would make for expansion in love and progress in well-being, of individuals and societies. Swamiji elaborates these ideas in his works: fear is death, unrighteousness, and wrong life (7.136). It comes out of the sense of isolation from our higher Self, from Brahman. Unity is knowledge, diversity is ignorance: 'Out of diversities we are all going towards this universal existence. Families into tribes, tribes into races, races into nations, nations into humanity' (8.138). The whole universe is one existence. 'The history of civilisation is the progressive reading of spirit into matter' (8.429). Swamiji addresses the need for interdenominational understanding towards a common goal of unity. He describes God's book as a continuous revelation in which the Bible, the Vedas, the Quran, and other sacred books are but so many pages; and yet, an infinite number of pages remain to be unfolded (2.374).

As early as 1896 Swamiji expressed his wish to start one centre in Calcutta and another in the Himalayas. The latter would be the centre for European workers, who should not be killed by forcing on them the Indian mode of living and the fiery plains. He announces in the same breath his plan to send out Hindu boys to every civilized country to preach, and also to get foreign men and women to work in India (6.384–5). He looks forward to the time when every person will be as intensely practical in the scientific world as in the spiritual, when the harmony of oneness will pervade the whole world (2.188). He asks his disciples to become occidentals of occidentals in their spirit of equality, freedom, work, and energy, and Hindus to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts (5.29).

### ***Intercultural Exchange***

In his morning talks at Almora, Swamiji would share his thoughts on East-West cultural exchange, which transcends interfaith dialogue. He speaks fondly of the Hungarian scholar who traced the Huns to Tibet

and lies buried in Darjeeling; of the old Bengali (Kutil?) characters inscribed on the doors of Chinese temples; of David Hare, a Scotsman and atheist who died nursing a student through cholera and was denied a Christian burial, to be finally buried by his own boys in a swamp which became a place of pilgrimage at College Square in Calcutta. Swamiji even recalls with pride his old Scotch master, Mr Hastie, who had sent him to Sri Ramakrishna and at the end of his life agreed to the view that all is God (9.346, 350). And regarding Max Müller, Swamiji tells that the professor was a Vedantist of Vedantists, whose 'heartbeats have caught the rhythm of the Upanishads, "*Tamevaikam janatha atmanamanya vacho vimunchatha*—Know the Atman alone, and leave off all other talk"' (5.280–1).

Swamiji says that in the Himalayas must be one of those centres not merely of activity, but more of calmness, of meditation, and of peace (3.354), and explains in the prospectus that this centre is being started on the Himalayan heights, the land of the first expiration of the one Truth (5.436). He amplifies his mission in terms of India's needs, in powerful accents given by the mighty Himalayas. In his poem 'To the Awakened India,' he asks India to come back to the source, renew its strength from the land of its birth, tune its voice to the immortal song of the heavenly River, derive eternal peace from the Deodar shades, imbibe infinite love and the Truth, the One in all, from Himala's daughter Uma. Further, he asks Indians to start afresh for working new wonders (4.387–8). He addresses the theme of India's awakening to say that the longest night seems to be passing away: 'The seeming corpse appears to be awaking and a voice is coming to us ... reflected as it were from peak to peak of the infinite Himalaya of knowledge, and of love, and of work. ... Like a breeze from the Himalaya, it is bringing life into the almost dead bones and muscles, the lethargy is passing away, and only the blind cannot see, or the perverted will not see, that she is awakening, this motherland of ours, from her deep long sleep' (3.145–6). He predicts that 'strong souls from all quarters of this earth, in time to come, would be attracted

to this Father of Mountains ... when mankind will understand that there is but one eternal religion, and that is the perception of the divine within, and that the rest is mere froth.' He affirms that if these Himalayas were taken away from the history of religious India, very little would be left behind (3.354).

Swamiji hails the gushing springs and roaring cataracts, the icy rivulets and ever-flowing streamlets, issuing from the eternal snow-capped Himalayan peaks, which combine and flow together to form the gigantic river of the gods, the Ganga, and rush impetuously towards the sea (4.407). The grandeur and beauty of the Himalayas create an intense longing in Swamiji to metamorphose from *bhakta*, divided, into *avibhakta*, undivided, through *atmajajna*, self-giving. His words ring with an urgency to sacrifice the little self, the puppet, to the great Self, the puppeteer, to unite the *vishvamaya*, immanent, with the *vishvottirna*, transcendent, to re-assume his true nature.

There is, however, a subtle and simmering connection between Swamiji's total involvement in the turmoil of the world of activity and the intense urge for withdrawal to the Himalayas. The withdrawal to Himalayan heights is designed in the prospectus to replenish the reservoir of life, enhancing energy and power, from which altruistic, world-transforming initiatives emerge. Swamiji expresses his willingness to be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries to worship and serve his God the wicked, the afflicted, the poor of all races (5.137). This consuming desire to serve does not render his renunciatory mission nugatory. On the contrary, it fulfils his life mission of seeking and serving one and the many as one.

For Swamiji, therefore, the Mayavati centre is a place of strenuous exertion in abjuring the personal, to advance towards the impersonal, to abdicate the seeming disunities, for embracing the ineluctable unity of humankind with the universe. He undertakes to recollect and renew the quest for uniting the many with the one, a quest that has been attempted in many ways in the Himalayas through thousands of years. The quest underlies



*Sagarmatha (Mt Everest) trek (Ngozumpa Glacier from Gokyo Ri), Nepal; Mt Everest looms in the background*

several fields related to the Himalayas—from its sacred geography to the confluence of faiths, to the cross-fertilization of ideas, to the convergence of languages, cultures, and arts that occurred there.

### **Sacred Himalayan Geography**

Himalayan lakes, forests, and peaks have been considered sacred sites of creation, well-being, and bounty. The ancient trade route from Tibet through Yarkand, Kashgar, Khotan, and Leh traverses Mangyu, the land of many people. The Sagarmatha or Chomolungma—Mt Everest—represents the Mother Goddess; Nanda Devi epitomizes Shakti, energy. The Bayul Demajong, ‘hidden land of sacred treasures’, that is Sikkim is presumed to have been blessed by Padmasambhava, who kept hidden *ter*, treasures, to be revealed gradually to the growing wisdom of lamas. The area is home to Yoksum, which is seen as a *lha-khang*, altar, for offerings to Mt Khangchendzonga. It is associated with the sacred text Naysol and is jointly governed by Lepchas, Limbus, and Bhutias. It is the valley of rice. The Sohpetbneng peak in Meghalaya is considered the ‘navel of the heavens’ and the umbilical cord that connects the earth and heavens. Sacred groves like Mawphlang and relict rainforests like Mowmai, also in Meghalaya, are abodes of power, ancestral spirit, community identity, purity, longevity, inspiration, revelation, as well as rich biomass, high litter nutrient release, speciation, and carbon sequestration. The sacred groves preserve populations of pollinators and predators and offer safe refugia for propagation of rare floral and faunal species. Many sacred groves in Garhwal are dedi-

cated to Hariyali Devi or Yogamaya, Krishna’s sister, who moved to Hariparbat after turning into lightning. They are associated with an annual pilgrimage known as Doli Yatra. At Dharamgarh in the Kumaun Himalayas the forests have been handed over to Kokilamata, the goddess of justice, for protection. In Kashmir Hindus and Muslims have shared and tended mountain springs, called nagas, associated with sacred forest patches. Kartikeya split open the Himalayan pass, Kraunchadwara, from Kailas to the south. Bodhisattva Manjusri drained the *nagabhrada*, ‘lake of the nagas’, that was Kathmandu, with a single stroke of the sword, thus allowing the devout to access the Dhyani Buddhas. The Bonist Tenma goddess lives in a dark gorge in Sikkim. The *chaud-dah devatas*, ‘fourteen deities’, of Tripura represent bamboo, flowers, spirits, water, mountains, elements, and the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. The Himalayan imagination transforms the universe into a stage in which nature and culture are drawn to interact in ritual pantomime.

### **Confluence of Faiths**

Sages, spiritual seekers, and traders have been traversing the vast Himalayan mountains, braving mortal dangers from natural calamities and violence from hostile human or animal predators, to preach the message of love, compassion, and unity of all creation; to translate and transmit texts conveying such message in different languages; to set up Vaishnava *sattras*, Buddhist *gompas*, Shaivite maths and temples; to create and honour sacred lakes, groves and landscapes, water-heads, moun-

tain springs, and passes. The movement spills over the north-east Himalayas into South East and East Asia, and from the north-west into western and eastern Central Asia, through the Pamir, the Kunlun, and the Tien Shan mountains, the Takla Makan desert, through oasis cities, caravanserais, and trade entrepôts. *Lotasavas*, intercultural translators, like Kumarajiva, Atisha Dipankara, and Padmasambhava converted warring groups into amicable communities. The Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Puranas, Agamas, the recitative and liturgical traditions of various denominations, the rites of royal consecration, the theory and practice of assimilation of the person and afflatus of gods and kings, of gods' cities and human cities, architectural elements like cubical towers and stilts, and the mix of forest, flood, bluff, and spurs in marvels of hydraulic engineering move back and forth between the north-east Himalayas and South East and East Asia. Mystical ecstasies, liberation theology, and freedom of thinking bind the Rishi tradition in Kashmir with the Sufi dervish tradition of Central Asia. The Malik Muslim shepherds are, for generations, guides at the holy Hindu shrine of Amarnath. Hindus and Muslims offer prayers in common to the shrines and tombs of Muslim Rishis in Kashmir. The Balti-speaking Shiite Muslims of Sura valley, the Brokpa Muslims, and the Tibetan Buddhists of Zaskar in Ladakh share composite names, *langde* farming practices, dispute resolution strategies steered by headmen called Goba, marital rites, pre-Buddhist deities like Gesar and Brugma, and Chaugan or horse polo. Al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, Rudaki, Mirza Haidar Tughlat, al-Hamadani, Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, and, in recent years, Rahul Sankrityayan and Nicholas Roerich have acted as intercultural translators between Central Asia and the world across the Himalayan heights.

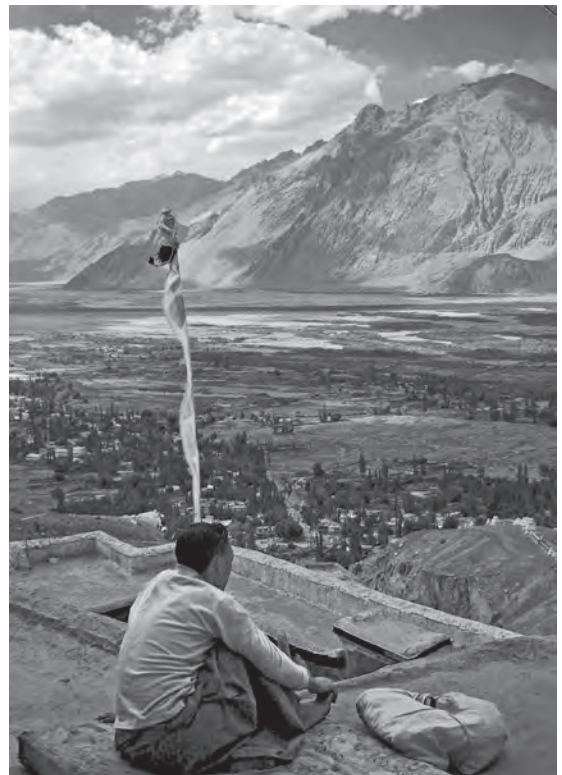
### **Cross-fertilization of Ideas and Practices**

The quest for unity has thus been articulated in an intra-Himalayan and trans-Himalayan migration of ideas. The ideas have been variously expressed in intercultural dialogues, syncretic patterns of visual and performing arts, collaboration of communities

in the conservation of natural and human resources, customary laws, lifestyles, practices, tools and implements, ceremonials and rituals, and in exchange of medicine, food, and household articles of decorative and utilitarian use.

The Himalayas have risen from the primal waters and provide a backdrop to the Vedic 'Creation Hymn', which speaks of the fathomless watery abyss where there is 'neither aught nor nought', only 'darkness wrapped in darkness'—the fervent heat of love, the spring of mind, inciting Creation. In the Vedas, with its Himalayan canvas, things become persons, qualities objects, adjectives nouns, and epithets deities. Inspired by Vedic concepts, Emerson writes: 'When me they fly, I am the wings; / I am the doubter and the doubt, / And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.'<sup>2</sup> Yoga and dhyana in India, Chinese *chan* and *chi*, Japanese *zen* and *satori*, Sufi *tariqa*, *fana*, and *dhauq* provide analogous approaches to direct communion of the soul with the oversoul, in and across the Himalayas. Yoking of mind, soul, and body with the Supreme Being, of noumenon with

*Buddhist monk at Diskit Gompa, Ladakh*



phenomenon, plurality and unity, the benefic and the malefic, *terribilità* and calm, light and shadow, remain as constant themes in the shared universe of ideas, born in the womb, lap, and shadow of the Himalayas. Buddha becomes what every person potentially is, Mara transformed: 'Yah kleshab sah bodhibh yah samsarah tan-nirvanam; (the source of) affliction is (the source of) enlightenment, world affirmation is world negation.' Lao-tzu teaches Tao, the 'Way of Nature', I Ching the eternal interaction of yang and yin, light and shadow. Purusha-Prakriti *mithunas* find correspondence in *yab-yum* couples in Himalayan art. Confucius teaches harmony between laws of right conduct and regularities of nature. Chuang-tzu would let the world be, rather than govern it, and see the relativity of things in a universe as small as a tare seed, in a hair tip as large as a mountain. Muro Kyuso in Japan would form true men rather than learned ones. Bhutanese national etiquette, *driglam namzha*, teaches total discipline of body, speech, and mind. Every good deed increases the stock of religious merit, *sonam*, for the Sherpa. Zoroastrian haoma and Vedic soma and the motifs of yaksha, *ihamriga*, apsaras, *kirtimukha*, *kalpalata*, and *dohada* merge across Himalayan and Central Asian regions in a celebration of the rotary cycle of waters—in blood, milk, mead, rain, and sap. Shamanism, Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shaivism come together to spread a message of balance between the male and the female, the kinetic and the static, power and grace, passion and intelligence. The rivers and mountains turn into abodes of deities and dramatis personae that play out a primeval drama in the theatre of the universe, of creation and procreation, emanation and resolution. Across the Himalayas come Greek, Parthian, Roman, Saka, Hun, and Turkish influences, all orchestrating the conversation of humans and non-humans, transforming figural and ornamental motifs into consensual art patterns. What Josef Strzygowski, Stella Kramrisch, and Ananda Coomaraswamy describe as an interaction and marriage of the northern Aryan—linear, abstract—with the southern Dravidian—plastic, volumetric—is executed through these

trans-Himalayan movements of people, ideas, and expressions. The largest water tower in the world, a Vavilov centre of bio-cultural diversity, the youngest mountain range, and yet the oldest repository of human inspiration, the Himalayas provide an object lesson in the theory and practice of Vedanta—the ceaseless osmosis between diversity and unity—and bear the footprints of seers, negotiating centuries of human history through struggles and victories, failures and hatreds, reconciliation and integration.

### **Convergence in Archaeology, Iconography, Iconology, and Trade**

All across the Himalayas the urge for unity has been articulated in intermeshing conceptions of *dana*, gift, *maitri*, amity, and *jnana*, knowledge, letters of alphabets, directions, emotions, musical instruments, hairstyles, and ornaments. The 84 Mahasiddhas; 5 Dhyani Buddhas; protective *pancharaksha* goddesses; 8 auspicious symbols; 7 insignia of sovereignty; arhats in groups of 16, 18, or 500; 24 previous Buddhas; 550 Jatakas; 8 Taoist immortals; gandharvas; *rakshasas*; and *danavas* have become part of a shared iconographic repertoire. Itinerant storytellers, called *mankhas* or *saubhikas*, carry narrative *patas*, scrolls, to illustrate their discourses. Scholars like Kumarajiva, Atisha Dipankara, Bodhidharma, Padmasambhava, Shantarakshita, and Kamalashila, and Mahasiddhas like Tsongkhapa, Avadhutipa, Milarepa, Virupa, and Marpa translate and interpret texts. Kings like the legendary Indrabodhi, Srongtsan-gampo, and Khrisong Detsen promote faith. Bronze casters like Balbahu or Aniko, travel from Nepal through Tibet to China at the request of Kublai Khan. Sculptors like Dhiman and Bitpal, who represented eastern and central Indian schools of art, under King Dharmapala, influence Tibetan art.

(To be concluded)

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# ***Berlin Story: Germans, Jews, and Forgiveness***

**Dr Sandie Friedman**

The other day you left Dakshineswar in a temper.  
I prayed to the Divine Mother to forgive you.<sup>1</sup>

—Sri Ramakrishna to Rakhal

Bear with everyone's shortcomings. Forgive offences by the million. And if you love all unselfishly, all will by degrees come to love one another.<sup>2</sup>

—Swami Vivekananda

## ***An Invitation to Berlin***

‘**W**HY DO HUMANS TREAT one another so cruelly?’ a friend asks me one Sunday morning at the Vedanta Centre. ‘We often treat animals with more compassion than other human beings.’ She recounts examples in American history: the forced relocation and genocide of Native Americans, slavery and its legacy of racial prejudice and systemic injustice. We might have gone on to talk about countless other examples, including the deadly riots between Muslims and Hindus at the time of Indian partition. My friend asks why one people would set out to destroy another, and how it is possible to understand perpetrators of cruelty, especially when executed on a vast scale. Before our conversation ends, and well before we can answer any of these questions, we are called into the shrine room for the Sunday lecture.

After the lecture more questions occur to me: How do we move beyond traumatic history? How can the perpetrators find the courage to apologize publicly, and how can the families of victims forgive? In the aftermath of atrocity, communities must learn to live together again. South Africa established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission so that those who had suffered under apartheid could tell

their stories publicly; the purpose of bringing the truth to light was to offer reparations to the victims and, ultimately, to foster reconciliation between blacks and whites. Most of the time, however, the bereaved must erect their own memorials, conduct their own ceremonies of remembrance, or console themselves by publishing the injustices they have suffered. The result may be that there is no memorial. The writer Toni Morrison has pointed out, for instance, that there is no special place where we can go to reflect on the history of slavery: ‘There is no suitable memorial, or plaque, or wreath, or wall, or park, or skyscraper lobby, there is no three hundred foot tower, there is no small bench by the road, there is not even a tree scored and initialed ...’<sup>3</sup> We have so many memorials to tragedies large and small, she suggests, but not to the injustice that has marked American history most deeply. However, I recently had the chance to witness a rare and moving instance of public apology and forgiveness between Germans and Jews, between the children or grandchildren of the perpetrators of the Holocaust and a group of people who were directly affected—people who, as children, had lost a nation, a home, and sometimes a family.

Since 1969 the German government has funded a programme for Jewish Berliners who were persecuted or forced out by the Nazis. Twice or thrice a year a group of about thirty former Berliners are invited, and each participant may bring a partner: spouse, child, relative, or friend. My mother, Suzanne Friedman, is one such Jewish Berliner. She was born in Berlin in 1935 and was forced to emigrate with her family a year later, fleeing first to England and later to the US. The family was lucky to escape

deportation to concentration camps and death.

My mother and her family were eligible, then, to attend the programme for Jewish exiles and travel to Berlin as guests of the German government. As you may imagine, it is not easy to accept such an invitation. Suzanne's first opportunity came in 1979, when her father Rudolf was invited and asked her to accompany him. However, her father became ill and died before they could take the trip together. Several years later a cousin of my mother's asked her again, but this time she worried about leaving three young children behind, and declined. Thirty years after that first opportunity the Berlin Senate once again contacted Suzanne, and this time she accepted. Not only that, she forwarded the names of her sister Monica and cousin Hanna, who also accepted invitations to Berlin. I had long been interested in these trips and was eager to accompany my mother.

### ***Offerings and Apologies***

The Concorde was far more luxurious than any accommodation we could have afforded on our own: an elegant modern hotel located just off the Kurfürstendamm, Berlin's posh shopping boulevard. But we did not grasp just how pampered we would be until we came down for breakfast the morning after our arrival. I expected a 'continental breakfast': coffee, juice, and some pastries snatched in an atrium or lobby. So I wasn't sure we were in the right place the first time we entered the restaurant for breakfast. I felt disbelief—this couldn't be for us! But it was. Without even thinking to take a plate, we wandered through and marvelled at the array of cheese, cold meat, and smoked fish to put on fresh breads—those lovely little rolls called 'Broetchen'; innumerable varieties of jam; pristine white bowls of mango, cherry, grapefruit, honeydew; a selection of yogurt and freshly squeezed juices. There were eggs—scrambled and boiled, hard and soft—bacon, grilled tomatoes; you could order omelettes, crepes, or waffles. To top it off, you could have a glass of champagne—indeed, as many glasses as you liked.

We felt intimidated before this splendid banquet—especially Suzanne, who for as long as I can remember has had no more than an orange and a cup of coffee for breakfast. That first day we had a modest bowl of fruit, but the next day we did gain courage and tried other things—though, in our family, only my aunt and uncle were bold enough to drink champagne. I never quite got over my shock, even as the week went on and we enjoyed many other lovely meals. Later, I thought of those famous images of starving concentration camp victims, skeletons gazing out from behind barbed wire. I doubt very much that there was any conscious connection between the starvation of Holocaust victims and these magnificent spreads. And yet, I cannot help feeling now that our German hosts were trying to compensate us for the starvation of our brothers and sisters by feeding us so extravagantly, to the point where we felt overwhelmed. It is not surprising that Suzanne approached these offerings somewhat hesitantly.

The buffets were only one aspect, though, of our German hosts' generous and thoughtful care. We saw the famous streets and monuments of Berlin: the grand boulevard Unter Den Linden; the Brandenburg Gate, which has long stood as a symbol for the city; the Museum Island, with its imposing palaces of culture; the Reichstag (Parliament) building with its new glass dome, representing the transparency of democracy. We had a boat-ride on River Spree, which runs through Berlin.

Our hosts also made sure that we saw the sites of special interest to Jewish visitors, of which there are many in Berlin. The Jewish Museum, documenting two thousand years of German Jewish history, opened in 2001. Four years later, Germany completed a Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in the centre of the city, very near the Brandenburg Gate. In erecting a vast memorial, which resembles a cemetery, at the physical and symbolic centre of their capital city, the Germans effectively said: We are not hiding the memory of the Holocaust or our guilt. And on the site of the ornate New Synagogue, once the largest in Germany, but destroyed during

*Remember, O Eternal One,  
what was done to us.*

*Dedicated to the memory of  
our murdered brothers and sisters  
1933 – 1945  
and to the living  
who are to fulfil  
the legacy of the dead*

*The Jewish Community of Berlin*



the war, there is now a museum dedicated to Jewish life in and around the religious centre.

In addition to these prominent national sites, we were also shown several smaller memorials, some created by Berlin communities. One memorial, where a synagogue used to stand, displays the dates when trains carried Berlin Jews east to the concentration camps. Near a train station, a memorial shows children facing two ways: towards death—the camps—and towards life. It commemorates the Kindertransports, trains that carried Jewish children to England, where they found refuge until the end of the war and, often, beyond. I was most taken with a memorial on the August-Bebel-Platz, where the Nazis held book burnings in 1933. In the middle of the square is a window through which you can see a vast underground room, lined with empty white bookshelves. These shelves would hold all of the thousands of books that were burned.

One morning the organizers chartered a bus to the Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of the city, and when we arrived there an attendant met us. She had already located my great-grandparents' tombstone and led us through the vast cemetery to their grave. Before this trip I had not even known this graveyard existed and there I was, with my mother, aunt,

and cousin, reading the inscription to Johanna and Paul Ballin, my grandmother's parents.

We were grateful for these sites and the chance to visit them, but this was not what influenced the group most in our desire to extend forgiveness. Certainly, we appreciated these signs of German efforts to remember the Holocaust. But most important were the encounters with our German hosts: those who organized the trip, the officials who addressed us, and the volunteers who went everywhere with us. Even before we arrived, Herr Nemitz, the chief organizer, had already become a kind of legendary figure. We admired Herr Nemitz for his unflappable calm and his ability to fulfil any request. Once we arrived, this small dapper man hovered over us like a watchful spirit, smiling benevolently the whole time. We also began to grow attached to Margit and Barbara, volunteers who answered our endless questions, made sure that everyone was on the bus or with a tour guide, searched archives to find lost addresses, and simply kept us company as we rode from place to place. My mother's cousin Hanna, a professor of German, 'adopted' Barbara and kept her close by. When we were riding the bus together, Barbara told us the story of her mother's friendship with a Jewish child before the war, a little girl

who left Berlin on a Kindertransport. They remain friends to this day.

Of the formal speeches we heard—from the mayor, from city officials, and from senate members—the most moving was from Petra Pau, the young vice president of the Bundestag, German Parliament. She spoke to us as someone who was acutely conscious of the past and who has worked to combat ‘extremism, racism, and anti-Semitism’ in Germany today. The Nazis came to power, she said, not because Hitler was so strong, but because democracy was too weak. ‘You experienced the disaster to which that led,’ Pau continued, ‘which makes me all the more grateful to you for coming to visit Berlin now.’ Not only did Pau and other officials apologize openly for the suffering of the Jewish visitors and their families, they also repeatedly thanked them for coming to Berlin, for the opportunity to re-acquaint them with ‘their’ city. When Pau’s speech was over, one of our fellow emigrants spoke for all of us, thanking the vice president for her sincerity and directness, and telling her how meaningful the trip had been for us. Pau asked for the paper on which he had written his response, so that she could share it with other members of parliament. It was clear, at that very moment, that the apologies had been accepted and the Jewish visitors had extended their forgiveness.

Of course, not everyone felt this way. I spoke with the oldest member of our group, a woman who had spent two years in the concentration camp at Auschwitz and lost her parents there. In fact, from Berlin she was travelling on to Auschwitz, in Poland, to find out about medical experiments that had been performed on her, and whether these experiments were the reason she was never able to have children. Because of what she suffered at the hands of the Nazis, this woman doubted the sincerity of the Germans who were apologizing to us and kept her distance from the hosts.

On the other side, I could imagine the shame and guilt that must burden Germans of the generations following the Nazis—my parents’ generation and my own. No one who spoke to us could have

been directly responsible for Nazi atrocities; yet, I feel sure they were profoundly affected by this history. And it took great courage to stand before a group of Jewish Berliners and apologize. I admired this courage and I admired too the generosity of the elderly visitors who forgave, expressed gratitude, and showed affection for our German hosts.

### ***Atonement and Forgiveness in Spiritual Life***

I do not mean to suggest that the work of atonement and forgiveness is over; this journey was part of a necessarily long process, both public and private. In fact, the work of repairing transgression is central to Jewish spiritual life. Rosh Hashana, the New Year, is followed by a ten-day period of prayer and repentance, the Days of Awe, during which we ask forgiveness from those we have wronged. This period culminates on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—the holiest day of the Jewish year.

On that day we pray that God forgive our transgressions and inscribe us in the Book of Life. As a child, I envisioned a great book in the sky, with God’s pen poised above it. I found this image terrifying, and my feeling was in keeping with the sombre mood of adults on this holiday, which is spent mostly in prayer services at the synagogue. On Yom Kippur we abstain from food and drink, and in traditional Jewish communities Jewish men wear a ‘kittel,’ a white robe that will someday serve as the owner’s shroud. The kittel symbolizes humility, purity, and forgiveness, but it also reminds us of our mortality.

In a contemporary guide to the Jewish holidays I found a prayer recited in some congregations as the culmination of efforts to restore peace with others:

I hereby forgive all who have hurt me, all who have done me wrong, whether deliberately or by accident, whether by word or by deed. May no one be punished on my account. As I forgive and pardon fully those who have done me wrong, may those whom I have harmed forgive and pardon me, whether I acted deliberately or by accident, whether by word or deed. I am now ready to fulfill the commandment of ‘to love my neighbor as myself.’<sup>4</sup>

The aim of atonement this prayer implies is to renew one's commitment to loving others. For me, this prayer is a helpful reminder that self-critical reflection is part of the process, though not the endpoint: the goal is to renew our love for others.

I was moved to discover the passage in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* about Hriday's visit with Sri Ramakrishna. Although he has cared for the Master during an illness, Hriday has also taunted and insulted Sri Ramakrishna. But instead of becoming angry or holding himself aloof during the meeting, as we might do, Sri Ramakrishna weeps with Hriday. Sri Ramakrishna himself seems a bit surprised—and M even more so—at his response to Hriday, his spontaneous outpouring of sympathy. He cannot help but respond with tenderness towards a devotee who weeps and tells Sri Ramakrishna: 'I am deprived of your company and so I suffer.'<sup>5</sup> I do not know whether the Master expected to have to rein in his feelings or act with some restraint, but it is clear that consolation comes unbidden when a devotee implores him sincerely.

I am afraid I might not respond to someone who had hurt me with such freedom and generosity, without effort; I can only try to emulate Sri Ramakrishna's magnanimity. There may also be times when my motives for forgiveness are tainted by self-interest. In some of his writings, Swami Vivekananda expressed concern that we would dignify our weakness or passivity by calling it forgiveness. He wanted to be sure that forgiveness was offered from a position of strength, because otherwise it would hold no virtue: 'We know how often in our lives through laziness and cowardice we give up the battle and try to hypnotise our minds into the belief that we are brave.'<sup>6</sup> He recognized that Sri Ramakrishna's forgiveness was offered out of great love: 'Never during his life did he refuse a single prayer of mine; millions of offences has he forgiven me; such great love even my parents never had for me. There is no poetry, no exaggeration in all this. It is the bare truth and every disciple of his knows it' (6.232). Swami Vivekananda's observation gives us some

insight into why Sri Ramakrishna was able to offer comfort without hesitation or reserve, even to someone who had hurt him deeply.

With the question of forgiveness in mind, I found another passage in the *Gospel*. In response to M's despair over having to lead the life of a householder, Narendra sings a prayer for God's forgiveness of his sins, and especially for his failure to remember and worship the Divine. The speaker in this song has lived a householder's life, immersed in lust and greed, and in old age confesses that he has not observed sacred rituals nor meditated on God. He laments these omissions and advises his listeners to 'concentrate wholly on Shiva.'<sup>7</sup> Narendra suggests to M, through this song, that the offering of a sincere prayer for forgiveness is a comfort in itself, restoring the connection with God. Perhaps this connection is also restored when we renew our links with others.

At the end of our journey to Berlin, the volunteers Barbara and Margit accompanied us to the airport, shepherding the bewildered group towards the Delta Airlines counter. 'Thank you, thank you,' we said, embracing them for the last time. I rested my head on my mother's shoulder during the flight and, gazing at the blue sky above the clouds, felt gratitude for the week of reconciliation. Our trip was only a brief interval, but it offered hope that estranged communities and individuals can come together again.

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# Our Cultural Heritage

Swami Ranganathananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

## Concord and Respect

WE ARE ALL FACING WAR, violence, international destruction, and the thinkers look up to India. H G Wells, who produced the first world history—*Outline of History*—places Ashoka as the greatest crown head in the whole of human history: one who renounced war as an instrument of political policy and declared international peace as the greatest teaching of his empire and his political thoughts. That has not had any second example in human history. Similarly, in the world of religion, Ashoka proclaimed this truth of harmony and concord. That also has no parallel in human history. In various edicts on rocks and pillars, Ashoka proclaims this humanistic message which India was absorbing from the teachings of Buddha. The teachings of the earlier great spiritual teachers and the edict on toleration are historic. You will not find it in the history of any other country. The twelfth rock edict of Ashoka mentions that King Priyadarshi—that was what he called himself, '*devanam priya*,' dear to the gods—respects every religion, race, and followers of every religion, and he gives to followers of every religion, and he wants that virtue and spirituality must come out of every religion. Then he makes a wonderful statement: If a follower of any religion considers his own religion as the only true one and disparages the religions of others, that very person really disparages his own religion. For in religion, harmony, concord, is the right way. That particular utterance is something very historic, very unique.

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This is a minimally edited text of the first of the author's two Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel memorial lectures, delivered at Bombay on 3 and 4 November 1986.

Couched in the smallest utterance, purest words, we have the deepest meaning. In Sanskrit that utterance reads thus: '*Samavaya eva sadhu*,' concord alone is proper.' In the world of religion *samavaya*, concord, alone is correct and proper, not discord, not violence. Coming from the Rig Veda and getting strengthened through the teachings of Sri Krishna and the Gita, this principle did not remain merely with saints and sages. It influenced Indian political thought, political state policy, both of big empires and smaller states. That is one of the greatest inheritances of the people of India: the spirit of harmony, the spirit of tolerance, and respect for every religion; and there were many offshoots of this great policy when foreign religions began to come.

By 'foreign religions' I mean religions that had their birth outside India. Today most of them have become naturalized in this country. But when they came, they came from outside; and what respect, what welcome, they received in this country. This is something outstanding. The first group that came was the Jew, the Israelites. They were received very kindly, sympathetically and with respect by a small state in Kerala. They were persecuted everywhere. Their temples were shattered by the Romans in 70 CE. They dispersed all over the world. A group came to India, and to this day they have been here, respected, honoured, allowed to practise their own culture and religion. It is an outstanding aspect of human history. They were persecuted all over the world. In every country they were looked down upon. Only in India they received respect and were revered.

Later came the first Christian in the first century CE to Kerala—St Thomas. He was also given all wel-

come. This land is a land of many religions respecting every religion. And one coming in the name of God or a great spiritual teacher is honoured here. Another outstanding event was the coming of the Iranians, the Parsis, the Zoroastrians. There is a book by one Mr Nanavati titled *The Parsis*, published from Bombay. I was fascinated to read that book. You see a picture of the Parsis coming to the Western part of India—the Gujarat coast. The following scene is depicted in that book: All the Parsi refugees are there, their high priest is there, and the prince of that particular state is also there. A big meeting is going on and the prince is asking the high priest, ‘What do you want us to do for you?’ The high priest says, ‘Give us permission to practise our religion and culture in this country.’ ‘Granted.’ No argument at all. ‘Granted.’ ‘What else do you want?’ ‘Give us a piece of land which we can cultivate so that we do not become a burden on your society.’ ‘Granted.’ A few such questions and the answers are very quick: ‘Granted.’ Another beautiful scene follows: That priest asks for a bowl of milk. Somebody brings a bowl of milk before the whole audience; the priest puts a little sugar into that milk and tells the audience and the king: ‘This milk represents you, the people of India and the sugar is we the Parsis who have come from Iran. We shall sweeten your life here, and nothing more.’ How true it has been throughout the history of these twelve hundred years. When two cultured people meet, this is what happens. Have you any parallel to this in any part of the world?

Today’s young generation must understand what the quality of India’s culture is. Our education does not give us any insight into this. That is why our youth misbehave. They become un-Indian in their attitude, un-Hindu in their reactions. In the wake of Buddhism came the wide diffusion of the idea of harmony, tolerance, and understanding. The same political state would support several religions, giving respect and honour to every one. When the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang came to India in the seventh century, he saw what an amount of tolerance, what an amount of understanding there was. He saw India, a land of great knowledge, great uni-

versities: Nalanda, where he spent six years; Takshashila in Peshawar, a great university especially known for its teachings in the medical sciences.

This land was devoted to knowledge, devoted to wisdom, devoted to humanistic ideas. But later on bad days came. When you live long enough, there will be ups and downs in life. India has lived long enough. It has seen so many ups and downs. That is why it saw high prosperity; and then came adversity, centuries of foreign invasions; and India was not strong enough politically to resist foreign invasions.

### ***Spiritual and Political Wisdom***

When you study Indian culture you find two dimensions to this culture, one is called the *rishi vamsha*, the other *raja vamsha*. The first is a spiritual tradition, and the second a political tradition. And between the two, the *rishi vamsha* is always strong, always continuous, unbroken. The spiritual succession of India from the Vedic times to Ramakrishna has been uninterrupted. But the political succession of India has been interrupted again and again, broken again and again. This is one aspect of Indian history one must constantly keep in view.

Even in the most tumultuous period of its history, India produced Guru Nanak, during Babar’s invasion. During the most dismal period of history, in the nineteenth century under the British rule, India produced gigantic personalities like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and others. That is the spiritual strength of India, the spiritual continuity of India. That is called *rishi vamsha*; the other is *raja vamsha*. India has fared extremely badly in this *raja vamsha* aspect of human life. India is not politically well educated. It is lacking in political wisdom. When we study the long history of India, we find numerous occasions when it broke its political states. Greeks could easily invade India because it was not united. It had petty little states here and there. As a reaction to this invasion India produced the mighty emperor Chandragupta, the Maurya Empire uniting much of India at that time. Empires like this and the Gupta Empire have arisen again and again. But as soon as some great ruler passed away, weaker rulers came and

empires broke up into petty little states. This also has happened repeatedly. Congeries of little states often fighting with each other, often joining with foreigners to fight with others—lack of political wisdom has been written very ingloriously in Indian history. We have to correct it in the modern period.

But the spiritual side of India has been outstanding. India has never been an aggressive nation, remember that. That is because of the spiritual background. When you respect every religion, every being, how can you hate anyone? How can you go and fight and exploit any other person. The Upanishads saw this truth: '*Yastu sarvani bhutany-atmany-evanupashyati, sarva-bhuteshu chatmanam tato na vijugupsate*; one who sees all beings in the Self itself, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of that (realization)? When you see the same Atman in every being, when you see every being in the Atman, you cannot hate anyone—only love can come from you. This teaching, which was strengthened later on by the great Buddha and others, has gone deep into the blood of India.

Any nation that expands its energies immediately becomes an imperial nation with imperial conquests. Greece did it.

Tiny little native states were there, always fighting against each other. They were all united by Philip, and later by Alexander. The energies so generated could not be contained within Greece. It exploded into a military conquest of all the neighbouring countries from Greece to Punjab. The entire region became the Greek empire. In recent period we have seen the British—a small nation involved in quarrels. So they started a foreign policy by invading France. Then they became united. Many countries do this to overcome internal differences. You start an aggression outside, and all join together. Britain has done it several times. Vivekananda refers to it. India had not that kind of stimulus to unite—unite to fight with somebody. It has never done it. And throughout the centuries, when it expanded its energies—in Buddhism, and later on in the Gupta period—it was expressed only in the cultural sphere, the philosophical sphere. India has invaded the rest of the world philosophically, spiritually, again and again.

#### Cultural Influences beyond Borders

In his book *The Message of Plato*, the famous British writer E J Urwick says you can never understand Plato and Aristotle without understanding the Upanishads. Study the Upanishads, you will find Plato and Aristotle become clear to you. So India has influenced so many of these foreign countries throughout history, in the world of thought, in the world of ideas, in the world of culture.

Look at that scene presented by Plato: Socrates, the noblest of men, was condemned by the Athenian democracy as one who was misguiding the youth of Athens. Therefore, he must be killed. He must drink poison and die. Can you imagine men like Socrates being put to death in a country like India? He will be the centre of worship. Indians will honour him. Even later, when Jesus Christ was crucified in Palestine, that was due to intolerance—intolerance of any new idea. If Jesus Christ were in India, he would have been worshipped even in his lifetime as divine. This is India's culture.

Bertrand Russell once said that if you teach the world faster than it can learn, you are in trouble for yourself. Socrates spoke something beyond the comprehension of the Greeks at that time. Jesus did the same thing, whereas such teachings are well known to Indians. When Buddha spoke high ideas—highly metaphysical, highly rational—all Indians understood them. They accepted it at that time. Shankaracharya did it, and in recent times Vivekananda. He said beautiful things; he criticized Indian religion, Indian society, but Indians did not kill him. They honoured him. That is India, a wonderful country.

That culture is behind this nation.

Here is that scene: Socrates drinking poison, so many disciples are sitting around. They are weeping. Socrates is calm, but the disciples are weeping. Socrates chides them, 'I sent away the women from here and now you are also weeping.'

They become quiet. One of them named Crito asks, 'Socrates, how shall we bury you?' Socrates smiles and says, 'You must first catch me and the real I before you ask to bury me. Be of good cheer Crito. You refer to this body; as to the body, do with it what you do with other people.' This could as well be a chapter from any Upanishad. We read in the Bhagavad-gita: '*Nainam chhindanti shastrani nainam dahati pavakah, Na chainam kledayanty-apo na shoshayati marutah*; this (Atman, the Divine in man) no weapon can cut, no water can wet, no fire can burn, and no air can dry.'

The Atman is immortal. This is why Socrates could face death with a gentle smile. This is the great teaching of India which has influenced some other cultures by way of mutual collaboration. In this modern period India has a great challenge before it. It has a tremendous cultural inheritance. It has got diverse aspects. At one time we thought India is only a religious country. Its culture is only religious or philosophical. No positivistic element is there in Indian culture. That mistaken idea was there towards the end of the nineteenth century. But one supreme aspect of Indian culture that everybody could see was the artistic aspect. The aesthetic element in Indian culture is remarkable.

What is the source of that aesthetic element? In the *Taittiriya Upanishad* there is a beautiful description of the supreme Divine. That is not only *sat*, real, not only *chit*, pure consciousness, but also *ananda*, bliss. It is of the nature of bliss. Out of this bliss element of the divine Reality came the momentous impulse to develop art and aesthetic ideas in this country: literature, poetry, and drama; then dance and music of various types. Today India's artistic heritage—in spite of much destruction

during the medieval period—is marvellously rich. For the [1985] festival of India in the US, two thousand art objects had been sent to that country. I was in America at that time. The *National Geographic* wrote: ‘Eighty million Americans will be touched by this cultural blitzkrieg from India.’ What a wonderful blitzkrieg. That is the wonderful touch of India. So the artistic heritage of India is immense. Though much has been destroyed, what remains is so impressive.

The other great heritage is Indian philosophy and spirituality, so rational. In no other country you will find rational religion. You cannot question religion in other countries. Religions are based on creeds and dogma. They do not allow you to break them down. On the contrary, the Upanishads ask you to question. Buddha asks you to question. Today Ramakrishna, Vivekananda ask you to question. By questioning alone you can get the truth of religion, because religion is a science of human possibilities. That is the nature of philosophy presented in India. They call it ‘Vedanta’, the great philosophy of India coming from the Upanishads through various phases, including the Buddhist phase. That is the Advaita Vedanta of India, very rational, very practical, very universal; and that is the philosophy that is challenging even the most advanced aspects of modern science today. That is India’s cultural inheritance.

India’s political inheritance has been very weak, and today that is the problem it faces. India has a bright soul, ever pure, and every contemporary civilization has tried to come in touch with that soul of India, so healthy, so pure. It has no evil intentions against anybody, only love and human concern. That is why every contemporary civilization wanted to come in touch with India for two things: one, the wisdom of India; two, the wealth of India. The wealth of India invited trade. This trade has been very extensive. Even recently, in Tamil Nadu, a whole city was being unearthed from the sea—a Roman port, where Roman ships are lying below. We are trying to bring them up for the time being. Roman coins have been found in various places. The ancient Roman Senate once passed a law against Indian

trade because too much of Roman gold was coming to India. India had massive trade with Arabia, with Egypt, with Palestine, with Rome, and Greece as well. This was material. But more important was thought. Everybody was coming here to understand the philosophy, the spirituality of India. Even Alexander came in touch with the spiritual people of India. More than one Greek historian refers to Alexander’s meeting with a holy man in Punjab at that time. So that is the ancient heritage of India.

A tree has sap in it—it is strong. The bark supports the tree. The tree grows, the bark also grows. Then it is a living tree. If the bark does not grow along with the tree, it will compress the tree and kill it. But a living tree will shed an old bark and put on a new bark for itself. India is a living tree. It has shed many barks; the bark is always new, always fresh, but the tree itself is eternal, *sanatana*. The Gita says: ‘*Urdhva-mulam-adhab-shakham-ashvattham prahur-avyayam*’; they speak of an imperishable pipal tree with its root above and branches below.’ The universe is compared to the Ashwattha tree. The only difference is that the roots are upwards; branches are below. The unseen, the unheard, and the transcendental—that is the root. This side is the visible universe. The Gita and the *Katha Upanishad* compared the universe to that Ashwattha tree.

So, we have this wonderful Ashwattha tree growing, strengthening, widening. In the modern period bigger challenges have come and India has met these challenges. It is still strong today. That is the wonderful story of the Indian people. Studying history is good. You look backwards. But do not look backwards too much. You are living today, see the future. Vivekananda wanted us to look at the past and learn its lessons, and look to the future and create history. So, I tell all young people wherever I go in India, do not merely study history; remember now you are engaged in creating history. Till now you were victims of history. Other people created history. Indians became creatures of that history for the last thousand years. Today you have the capacity to create history, and through this creation you will influence the whole world.

# ***An Early World Wide Web: Religions of Eurasia***

**Dr Alan Hunter**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

LET US NOW LOOK AT some specific aspects of the religious heritage, aspects that we may term 'key religious heritage'.

**1. *The Incarnation*** • Numerous scholars in the field of religious studies, anthropologists, Egyptologists, classicists, and others have shown that it was an almost universal tradition in the culture of Eurasia that a saviour God incarnated as 'human', or at least as a special being who had human characteristics—Horus, Osiris, Dionysus, Adonis, Mithras, Krishna, and Buddha, to name but a few. This 'Being' is described in mythological motifs that are common to the whole cultural area: birth at winter solstice to God as father and Virgin as mother, prodigious childhood, defeats Satan, performs miracles, is opposed by local elites, crucifixion, descent to the underworld, resurrection, ascension. One interesting example given by Derrett is the similarity between the three mystical bodies of Buddha and those of the Father-Son-Spirit in Christianity; Lindtner's argument also includes a possible 'geomatric' transfer from 'tri-ratna' to 'trinitaria', a point taken up by other scholars.<sup>21</sup>

Based on ascertainable, rather than emotional, evidence I do not believe that we can ascribe historicity to saviour deities—Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, for instance—any more than we can to, say, Apollo or Heracles. However, even if someone could provide us with totally convincing evidence that, say, Krishna was a human being with a confirmed biography located in a historical setting, that evidence would still not disprove the above argument. It would rather mean that there is some kind of progression or development from history to myth.

**2. *Rituals and Practices*** • Rituals, initiations, and other practices were equally widespread. Baptism was a feature of the Egyptian religion attested in the Pyramid Texts; and of the Greek Eleusinian Mysteries.<sup>22</sup> Parallels are also to be found in the Eucharist—cults of Mithras and Dionysus—funeral services to save souls from hell, monastic robes, shaving the hair of monastic initiates, ringing of bells, domed basilicas, the practice of confession, relic veneration, rosaries, celibacy, chanting, and burning of incense—all of which were, and still are, widely used across the Eurasian continent.

**3. *Parables and Mission*** • Another parallel is the division of religious teaching into strata suitable for different kinds of people. At the popular level, there was a veritable cornucopia of teaching stories—parables—drawn from a universal stock from Africa to India. They provided simple messages in fables for uneducated people or for people new to religion, often using familiar animals or agricultural tasks, or family and social relationships to illustrate points about honesty, hard work, reciprocity, and the like.

However, many texts, and certainly oral traditions, contained spiritual teaching that was accessible only to initiates. Many such texts gain meaning through an understanding of their numerology and hidden meanings, the process of 'geomatria' referred to earlier being a good example. The biblical stories and numbers of the feeding of the five thousand,<sup>23</sup> or the mysterious catch of a hundred and fifty-three fish,<sup>24</sup> are probably derived from older arithmetical meanings that are now lost to us. Sacred mathematics was a commonplace in Egypt and Greece as well as in the Judaic tradition.

Another characteristic of some, but by no means all, religious traditions was the impulse to convert others—evangelism or mission. This was a key feature of Buddhism and Christianity and one that had major implications for the history of religion, as these two became the most widespread, and in the latter case especially, the most pro-active and best-organized of faiths in this respect. Perhaps in response to the needs of orthodoxy to promote missionizing, some institutions insisted on a literalist interpretation of scriptures—sometimes asserting the literal truth of what is clearly allegoric literature, sometimes promulgating hair-splitting doctrinal decisions on metaphors or fables now interpreted as history.

**4. *Spirituality and Ethics*** • The fundamental spirituality and idealist philosophy espoused by at least some Christians, especially Gnostics, are essentially the same as those of Indian and Greek spirituality.<sup>25</sup> Ethical and moral injunctions—like forgiveness, kindness, honesty, and humility—are almost universal in Eurasian and Chinese philosophies as well as religions of the period. Thus, there are numerous doctrinal parallels between, say, the Dhammapada and the Sermon on the Mount;<sup>26</sup> Hanson cites some parallel sayings attributed to Jesus and Buddha:

Jesus: Therefore confess your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed.

Buddha: Confess before the world the sins you have committed.

Jesus: In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Buddha: Let all sins that were committed in this world fall on me, that the world may be delivered.

Jesus: Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Buddha: Consider others as yourself.

Jesus: If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.

Buddha: If anyone should give you a blow with his hand, with a stick, or with a knife, you should abandon all desires and utter no evil words.<sup>27</sup>

**5. *Symbols and Art*** • Finally, there are striking parallels in the religious art and iconography of different Eurasian cultures. Symbols such as the cross and the fish are widespread, doubtless carrying different interpretations by different sects. The cross was probably interpreted as mystic geometry, perhaps the penetration of the divine into the material world; it was also a crucifix on which animals, like the sheep, would be depicted suffering, as vicarious atonements for humanity's sins and, of course, as the locus for the suffering saviour king on his journey to the underworld. The fish, again in mystic geometry, represents the pattern formed when two circles are interlocked, with the circumference of one passing through the centre point of the other. Certain 'noble beasts,' such as the eagle and the bull, also have widespread religious uses, as do certain mythical combination beasts.

A recent conference paper provides a wealth of concrete evidence about two specific examples, the lotus and the cross.<sup>28</sup> It is quite ironic that the lotus has come to be viewed by many as emblematic of Hinduism and Buddhism, and the cross of Christianity. Chan's paper shows clearly that both symbols were used by all three religions and by numerous other religious groups as well, throughout Eurasia and throughout several thousand years. Their present assignation to particular institutionalized religions is more or less fortuitous and could even be misleading. The lotus is probably of Persian origin, and its use as a symbol spread from its homeland to India in the east and North Africa in the west. It was used as a symbol of purity and holiness in South Asian religions, by Egyptian religionists, and also by Christians in Assyria and even China. The cross, especially the form of the Swastika, is found, if anything, even more widely—examples have been found in Anatolia and Iran dating back to 5000 BCE, and to later times in North Africa, Mongolia, India, China and, indeed, almost universally.

It is probably in statuary that the cultural fusion is most marked, especially in the renowned Gandharan statues of Buddha, developed over a long period in the region around contemporary Peshawar. Com-

monly known as 'Greco-Buddhist art'—but probably with influences from Syria, Persia, and India as well—a fusion of East and West led to the creation of the typical image of Buddha as a serene, transcendent, idealized human being, who bears something of the serenity of classical Athenian statuary but now in a religious system promulgated many thousands of miles to the east. Greek influence, especially the anthropomorphic representation of divinity in the form of the human male, spread right through to eastern India and along the eastern Silk Road, as far as present-day Xinjiang. In China it interacted with indigenous traditions of statuary, contributing to the magnificent Buddha images of the Chinese cultural world. Of course, the origins of Greek statuary are themselves complex and they probably ultimately derive from Egypt or even Mesopotamia—another example of the cultural web.

### ***Krishna, Buddha, and Jesus***

I will take these three figures as the most significant representatives of the 'holy biography' referred to above, those who are presented as the founders of modern Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity respectively, and whose lives and teachings contain so many parallels.

The dating and reliability of texts about or allegedly reporting the words of Krishna, Buddha, and Jesus is a notoriously technical and controversial subject that has occupied thousands of specialists over the centuries. Not surprisingly, scholars associated with these religions, especially conservatives or literalists, tend to argue that their respective texts were written close to the lifetime of the saviour and contain more or less reliable, quasi-eye-witness reporting. Those who for various reasons—scholarly, emotional, political, religious, or commercial—dispute these claims tend to argue that the texts were written at a much later day, by persons unknown, and with symbolic or garbled content.

My reading of the evidence is that Krishna's life story, or the many variants of it, is ahistorical; and a good number of even devout Hindus would have little difficulty accepting that proposition, as of

Rama too. The dating of the Upanishads, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavadgita, the Ramayana, and virtually of all early Indian scriptures and narratives is profoundly uncertain, sometimes even to a few centuries. Krishna is inspiration, a deity to be worshipped, a focus, a mantra, a spiritual master; not necessarily a 'real' human being of recorded history. Compared to adherents of other faiths, most Hindus seem to find it relatively easy to accept that a deity like Krishna has a meaning but not necessarily a historical literal biography. When it comes to many other gods and goddesses, Hindus are clearly moving in the realm of spiritual literature, the exuberant religious imagination.

Though a bit closer to our own times, the life and teachings of Buddha too are almost impossible to evidence in a meaningful way. The notions that we can reliably date him to the fifth century BCE or that the texts, especially of the Mahayana, are credibly attributable to him, are untenable according to any scientific evidence. The well-known and attractive 'life story' of Buddha, such as his enlightenment at Bodh Gaya and teaching mission around Sarnath, are unfortunately stories that have been almost certainly put together with no secure reference to any historical personage. It is highly unlikely that any Mahayana texts—those that bear the closest resemblance to Christianity—were produced earlier than the first century CE, following some three centuries or so of organic growth from oral traditions. The Pali canon, the earliest known records of 'Buddha's teaching', dates from about the first century BCE, though there are indications that it is a formalization of an earlier oral tradition from North India. Western non-Buddhist scholars, at least, tend to doubt that any safe attribution to 'Buddha' can be made.

There is equal uncertainty and dispute concerning the historicity of Jesus. It is probably correct to say that the letters of Paul are the earliest documents in the current New Testament; but as is well known, or notorious, the authenticated ones say not a word about a teacher living in Palestine. The canonical gospels, and the huge number of non-canonical ones as well, are of uncertain date and

were written or compiled, mostly in Greek, by persons unknown many decades after the events they purported to describe. Other canonical sections of the New Testament, like Acts and Revelations, are of even more obscure origin. Critics have listed numerous inconsistencies internally, and some think it unlikely that the compilers of the Gospel had any knowledge of Palestine or its geography. The attribution to Mark and the other Gospel-authors is purely a literary convention.

We could argue that these three paradigmatic figures are an application of the 'web template' of the saviour God to three important cultures: the first producing a Hindu folk/military hero, the second combining with North Indian asceticism and non-Brahminical tradition to produce the Himalayan-cosmic sage, and the third setting the saviour motif within a Roman/Jewish melodrama.

Incidentally, I think this analysis possibly helps to address an argument sometimes made by believers that Jesus, or Buddha, *must* have been a historical figure; otherwise it would have been impossible for such a large institution and movement to spring up in their names. I think few scholars would dispute that Rama, Krishna, and for that matter Lao-tzu were ahistorical figures; yet Hinduism and Taoism have had vast numbers of believers over the centuries. Historical rigour may, at first glance, seem like a threat to some forms of traditional spirituality, but even committed believers like Harpur can argue that 'literalizing and making a pseudo-history out of the Jesus story' in fact de-means the spiritual meaning. Jesus's life-story, like that of other saviours, should be understood as a dramatic representation of deep elements of human consciousness, not as an empirical narrative.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Separation**

An important topic, but unfortunately one for another article, is to analyse that, if there were such similarities among religions, why and how did there come about the separation into competing religions? There are probably three main answers to this: the first is the adoption of extremely rigid Christian

orthodoxy by the Roman Empire after its move to Byzantium. That meant the destruction or decay of non-Christian faiths within its frontiers and far less contact with representatives of non-Christian faiths from outside them. With the end of the Roman rule, there was no unifying empire or hegemony that would facilitate the free movement and interaction of peoples throughout Eurasia, as had been, albeit with more primitive technology, in the Persian and Alexandrian times. A second factor was the virtual collapse of the Silk Road and its 'Islamization', which started in earnest in the seventh century. This process, which is a whole field of study in itself, led to the destruction of Buddhist and other non-Islamic faiths across the landmass, a process intensified by Muslim invasions into South Asia.<sup>30</sup> A third was the institutionalization of churches in western empires, leading frequently to pogroms of non-believers, destruction of libraries, and ban on all other faiths.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the picture that emerges, as we can still notice today, is that Christianity became the religion of empires in Byzantium and Europe, subsuming other rituals, cults, doctrines, and symbols, and at the same time asserting that its own synthesis of doctrines, symbols, and rituals is uniquely true. Hinduism survived in South Asia, developing in a relatively natural way from its original roots; however, any potential for centralization was limited, perhaps in part because of the traditional liberal attitude towards dissent and also because of Muslim and then British domination of the secular power structure.

Meanwhile, in Asia the survival of Buddhism was mainly thanks to the tireless efforts of Chinese translators and monks to transplant this religion to China and thence to Japan, Korea, and other countries of East and South East Asia that were far removed from the Western orbit till the sixteenth century or later. Buddhism prospered mostly in the eastern extremities of Eurasia—for example in Tibet and China—where it gained sufficient presence to develop orthodoxies and institutions. Buddhism was to a great extent destroyed by the Islamic conquest of Central and South Asia and, for a variety of reasons, virtually died out in its earlier

strongholds of contemporary Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia.

### Dialogue and Sharing

The main theme of this article, then, is that a rich, abundantly creative ocean of religiosity developed between 4000 BCE and 500 CE across large areas of Eurasia. Ideas, motifs, art, and practices were intensively shared and crystallized in movements and institutions. Buddha, Krishna, and Jesus are not to be understood as historical figures in the conventional sense, nor are their 'biographies' historical—they are mythological and spiritual. Indeed, nor are their 'biographies' unique; rather, they are the most successful among dozens or hundreds of similar, competing ones.

There is an interesting or perhaps provocative challenge to interfaith dialogue inherent in this analysis. I would even argue that interfaith dialogue conducted by institutional leaders is unnecessary, and a misnomer. Eurasian religion is best seen as an intricate web of which the currently institutionalized 'religions' are 'servers' that have been pre-programmed in various ways. Another analogy is that the religious 'symbol blocks' could be regarded as something akin to DNA coding blocks.<sup>32</sup> Instead of, or as well as, being subject to virus, they can even transmute into destructive and self-destructive patterns, as well as sublime and cooperative ones.

Therefore, dialogue partners representing the major institutions will be imbued with their own particular traditions and interpretations. Where, as in most cases, they have been intensively socialized by those traditions, they will be operating from a limited perspective, probably overestimating their own uniqueness and under-acknowledging their shared heritage. In consequence, it seems to me that the best first step towards human cooperation in spiritual life would be to deconstruct one's own history, especially any history of intolerance. And why would one ever wish to convert when 'the other', to a large extent, already shares one's own basic beliefs?

If those with a missionary agenda could become more humble in this respect, conversion might then

regain its original intent of 'a turn to a deeper spiritual life' instead of persuading another to change his or her faith. As things stand at present, interfaith dialogue is generally conducted between two world views that present themselves as a priori separate—it seems to me that a dialogue on this footing is not necessarily doomed to complete failure but probably destined for rather limited outcomes. It could be more productive to search for and acknowledge the healthy, life-affirming 'DNA' in all faiths and to discard one's own negativities.

One aspect of reconciliation studies is the formulation of a shared history instead of separate histories based on cycles of hatred and mistrust.<sup>33</sup> Another is working towards a vision of a shared future. My article argues that far from being a threat to integrity, acknowledgement of shared heritage should be viewed as a positive contribution both to self-understanding and to interfaith dialogue.



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31. *The Jesus Mysteries: Was the 'Original Jesus' a Pagan God?*, 244.
32. This idea was suggested by Dr Kim-Kwong Chan, who I also thank for a constructive reading of a draft of this paper.
33. Andrew Rigby, *Justice and Reconciliation: After the Violence* (Boulder: L Reinner, 2001), chap. 9.



# Koyasan: A Buddhist Pilgrimage

Dr Dipak Sengupta

(Continued from the previous issue)

Golden Temple at Koyasan

SHINGON BUDDHISM WAS SYSTEMATIZED by Kobo Daishi or Kukai, meaning ‘heaven and ocean’. Henjo Kongo, ‘the *vajra* of all-pervading spiritual radiance’, was the mantra he was given at consecration; it has also become one of his epithets. Born in 774, Kukai was thoughtful and scholarly right from his childhood. Impressed by the Buddhist tantric ritual known as Akashagarbha’s technique of seeking, hearing, and retaining—Kokuzo Gumonji Ho, ‘Brilliant Star of Akashagarbha, Venus’—he joined the order and was initiated as a monk in 804. After initiation he travelled to China to study the rituals prescribed in the *Mahavairochana Sutra*. In 805 he was given permission to stay and study at the Xiningshi temple in Chang-an, the capital of T’ang China. Here he learnt Sanskrit well enough to study the scriptures: ‘There is no doubt that the knowledge of the Sanskrit syllabary that he and others gained in China played a major part in development of Japanese script during the course of the century.’

Although Kukai lived with his teacher Hui-kuo only for a short period, so impressive was his

progress that before his departure for Japan he was granted the final *abhisheka*, consecration. In his own words: ‘I stood before the *taizo-kai*, “womb world”, mandala and cast my flower in prescribed manner. It fell on the body of Mahavairochana Tathagata in the centre.’ He eventually became the eighth patriarch in the line of Amoghavajra. Thus, tantric Buddhism came to Japan in the form of Shingon-shu with Kukai. Back in Japan, Kukai was looking for a remote undisturbed unspoiled site, preferably on a mountain, where he could establish a centre for Shingon Buddhism. In 816 Emperor Saga donated him Mount Koya not far from Nara, the then capital. Kukai liked the mountain and was looking for the right place to build a temple, when two big dogs—one snow white and the other jet black—guided him to the proper site. There was built the temple of Kongobuji, which still serves as the headquarters of Shingon. Gradually many more temples came to be built all around. Kukai’s philosophy, in simple terms, can be put thus: It is possible to become a Buddha in this body, here and

now, through rituals and worship.

After the chanting in the Buddha Hall, one of the monks who could speak broken English gave us a small tour of the monastery complex. Every monastery has three halls: Buddha Hall for devotional prayer, Dharma Hall for congregational teachings, and Monks' Hall for monks to stay and sleep. There are no separate rooms for individual monks. The Dharma Hall is a large empty hall with tatami on the floor, a few picture scrolls on the wall, and a bunch of flowers organized in Ikebana style by the wall that the congregation faces. There are images of Fu-do at the entrance of the Dharma Hall. There were no religious pictures inside the hall—only nature images. One is not so much to see the paintings as to enter them and feel the empty spaces and the world within it. The paintings of dynamic waterfalls show the flux of the natural world. Japanese Buddhist art can be austere. They say, 'It takes only one blade of grass to show the wind's direction.' I thought one has to grow up with the tradition to understand the monks and their art. Our monastic guide told us that the garden around is like the mind emptied in meditation and at the same time a means to attend to that mind. Seeing us completely bewildered he suggested we visit other places of interest and gave us detailed instructions on how to reach there.

### **Okunoin**

As instructed, we availed the bus to Okunoin at the far end of Koyasan. The bus ran through the town. It was very quiet and peaceful. After a few stops the bus reached its destination. We got down, and after washing our hands and face in the nearby fountain started walking along a narrow walkway up a hill. All along the path were gravestones of different sizes and shapes—the whole mountain was actually a cemetery. The gravestones were all made of granite or marble and were designed very artistically. Some of the graves had statues of bodhisattvas; some even had images of Tara and Manjusri. As we neared the top, we came across older graves covered with moss and weeds. The relatives of the deceased had gathered by some of the graves and

were performing ceremonies with incense, candles, and chants. It was interesting to note that most of the newer stones had been shipped from India. The quarries of South India are large suppliers of such stones all over the world.

We met a couple standing in front of a stone image of a child with a hand-knit woollen cap and some plastic toys in its lap. The man introduced himself as Takashi. He was teaching English in a nearby school and was quite excited to see us. We were the only people he had ever met from the land of Buddha. He had never come across an Indian before. That was the grave of his only child, who had died ten years ago. He had to spend a fortune to buy this tiny piece of land. His family grave was up on the hill. But, as his wife stated, only the eldest son of the family can have the tombstone marker, not any other family member. Her husband being the second child would not have the privilege. He would be cremated either in some corner of the family graveyard or in some fallow land around. Buying a new piece of land was an alternative, but that was beyond their means.

Having passed the graveyard we reached the Gobyobashi, a bridge across a mountain stream. Crossing the bridge we entered the sacred grounds where Kobo Daishi lived. Behind the bridge plates were written the names of thirty-seven Buddhas of the Kongokai, 'Diamond World'. We reached a large temple in a wooded area full of tall pine trees as ancient as the stream. This was the temple of lanterns. One can buy lanterns here and dedicate them to Kobo Daishi. There is also a small tourist shop right in front of the temple where one can buy lacquered wooden plates with a string attached and get one's prayer written on it. This plate is then hung on a specified stand in the temple. This practice is prevalent in almost all temples in Japan. I have also seen such prayers written in red ink on paper and then tied to a great banyan tree at Bara Kachary near Kolkata.

At the foot of the bridge were a series of large statues of Mizumuke Jizo, guardian deities, placed in a line. In front was a trough with running water and a number of wooden ladles. Visitors were using

the ladles to drench the statues with water. I too did the same.

Kobo Daishi spent the last part of his life on Mount Koya. At the age of sixty-two he entered into eternal meditation in a cave which was later turned into a mausoleum. He is believed to be still alive here at Okunoin, tirelessly striving to aid all beings. He is reverently offered two meals every day. We could see the mausoleum only from a distance, across a fence. For the Shingon followers this is the most sacred place on earth. Finishing the tour we sat under an ancient pine tree, enjoying the quiet and serene environment. Whenever I happened to doze off, I remembered the story of Bodhidharma with awe.

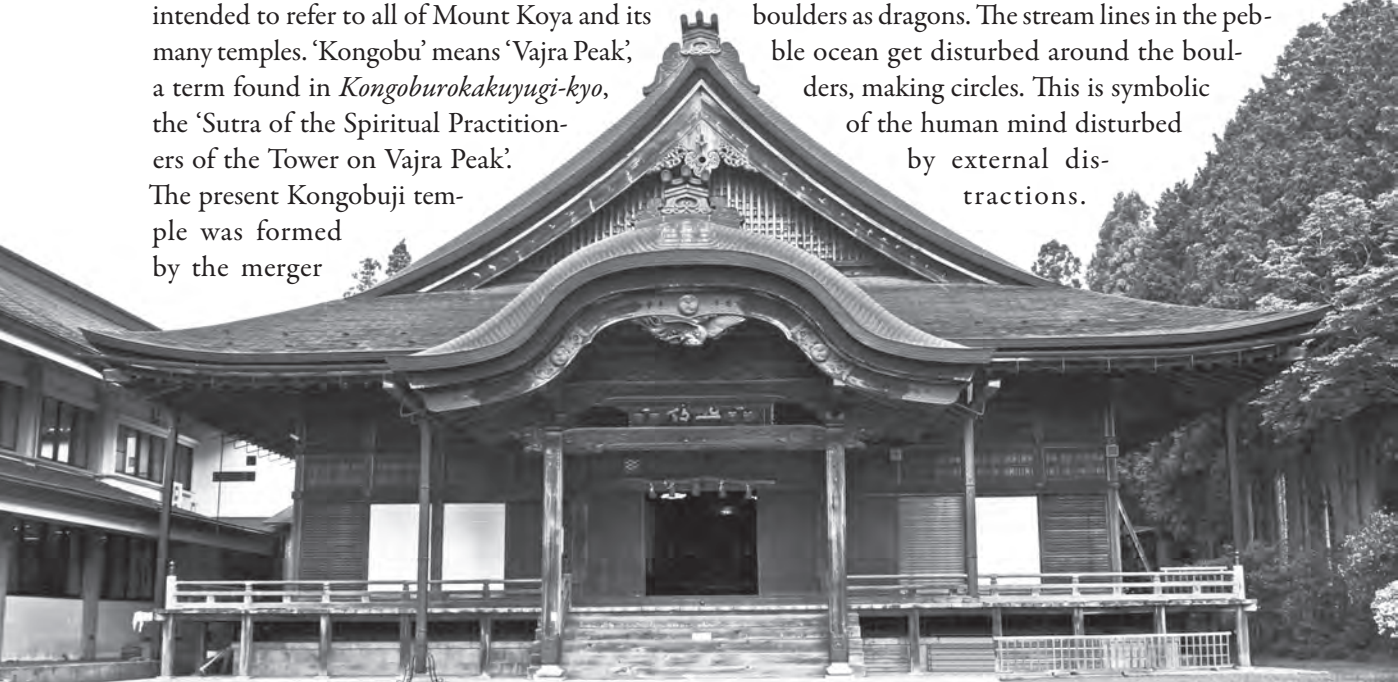
### **Kongobuji Temple**

Koyasan is a plateau nine hundred metres high and surrounded by eight peaks. These peaks are thought to represent the eight petals of a lotus in bloom, the whole being suggestive of the core of a mandala with its eight deities arranged on the eight petals of a lotus with the Buddha at the centre. That is exactly where the Kongobuji temple is—at the centre of the lotus. The name ‘Kongobuji’ was originally intended to refer to all of Mount Koya and its many temples. ‘Kongobu’ means ‘Vajra Peak’, a term found in *Kongoburokakuyugi-kyo*, the ‘Sutra of the Spiritual Practitioners of the Tower on Vajra Peak’. The present Kongobuji temple was formed by the merger

of two separate temples. As the headquarters of Koyasan Shingon-shu, it controls four thousand branch temples across Japan.

Kongobuji is a very large temple made of wood, with a sloping roof resting on hand-carved finials. Entry into the temple is through a side door where visitors put off their shoes and wear house slippers. The temple has halls of different sizes partitioned by sliding doors. Common visitors are not allowed inside the room in order to maintain the lacquered wooden floor untarnished. The walls are all decorated with paintings on different themes by famous schools of painters. Some of the rooms are painted with birds and flowers of the four seasons. One of the walls depicts Kukai leaving for China on a boat, a Chinese town, and lastly Kukai with two dogs, one white and the other black, settling down on Mount Koya.

Kongobuji has the largest Zen garden. It is an ocean of pebbles furrowed with parallel lines symbolizing a smooth and steady flow of mind. There are two dragons shaped with a few boulders embedded amidst the pebbles. Of course, unless you are conversant with Zen art it is difficult to imagine the boulders as dragons. The stream lines in the pebble ocean get disturbed around the boulders, making circles. This is symbolic of the human mind disturbed by external distractions.



A tea ceremony was also in progress in the temple, but we did not attend it. It would have been impossible for me to stay on my knees for an hour or so, sipping tea.

Pilgrims were pouring in—all Japanese. Most of the older pilgrims had rosaries in their hands and were counting beads. We kept walking round the temple but could not get ourselves sated with the beauty of the place—the paintings, the garden, the hand-crafted cranes and other mythical animals. The most surprising part, however, was the absence of any Buddha figure in all the rooms. One can buy a picture of Kukai framed in gold, but not a picture of Buddha. I was earnestly looking for one. Whenever I visit a Buddhist country I make it a point to buy an image of Buddha. But in Japan you cannot get a replica—a statue or a picture—of, say, the giant Buddha of Todaiji. There were also no murals on the walls of any of the temples we visited showing the life of Buddha or the stories of the Jataka, which are so common in Ladakh, or in Nepal and Thailand. But the Kongobuji temple does have a footprint of Buddha. It is an exact replica of the one in Bodhgaya or of Vishnu's footprint found in the Vishnupada temple at Gaya. One research scholar who specializes in Buddha relics has counted 3,600 Buddha footprints across South East Asia. But he does not mention the original source of these footprints. A Japanese book *The Teaching of Buddha* says: 'Do not seek to know Buddha by this form or attribute; for neither the form nor the attributes are the real Buddha. The true Buddha is Enlightenment itself. The true way to know Buddha is to realize Enlightenment.' The Japanese believe in this with all their heart.

Three days passed in a flash. We really felt sad when on the fourth morning we realized it was time to go. We were standing in the garden looking at fishes without exchanging words. We almost knew each fish, each plant, and each boulder. The sky was heavy with clouds and it was drizzling. One of the monks came with a large umbrella and helped us with the luggage. As we tied our shoe laces, the monk waited for us patiently, kneeling down on the

floor. When we were out on the courtyard he bowed down touching the ground with his forehead, making pranam as we know it. He was probably praying for our safe journey. We went down in a cable car and were soon aboard a train to Kyoto.

### **Toji Temple**

To commemorate Kukai's going into eternal meditation, pilgrims visit the Toji temple at Kyoto in thousands on the twenty-first of every month. Small traders also gather in the temple precincts, both to pay homage and to do some business. Thus a flea market, called Kobo-san by locals, has developed there. We found this to be quite a big market, with hundreds of small traders displaying their goods. Some were ordinary householders who had come with some old artefacts or home-made ceramics, while others had opened shops with a variety of home-made food. Some had displayed their products on tables, others were selling from their trucks, and still others had set up portable shops. One could buy almost anything, from used clothes and cooking ware to nice ceramic pieces and costly scrolls. We arrived at Toji in the afternoon just before the market was being closed and bought some nice ceramic pieces and used kimonos at a cheap price. In a regular shop these would have been beyond our reach.

As the shopkeepers were packing up, a woman approached us with a plate full of sweets. She offered them to us and we said, 'No money'; we did not want to spend for food that we might not like. The woman also replied, 'No money.' After a few words were exchanged, we realized that while we meant we did not have money to spare for the sweets, she wanted to let us know that she did not want any money. As the day was over and she did not want to carry the foodstuff back home, she was distributing it to visitors. We being foreigners happened to be the best targets. Other food sellers also obliged us by offering their items. So it became a free evening meal for us. Though we insisted, nobody was ready to accept any money.

The story of the Toji temple goes back to 794,

when Emperor Kammu transferred the capital of his country—Japan was not unified then—from Nara to Kyoto and built the temple there. In 823 Kukai established a Shingon centre in the temple. Since then, along with Koyasan, Toji temple became a great pilgrimage site for Buddhists. The temple was formally named Kyo-o-gokokuji, which means ‘the temple which guards the capital and the land by the blessings of the king of doctrines’.


Toji temple is famous for its five-storeyed pagoda. At 187 ft it is supposed to be the highest wooden structure in Japan. It was built by Kukai in 826; it was struck down by lightning on four occasions, and was rebuilt each time. Inside there are four Buddhas and eight bodhisattvas watching over the city ever since Kukai established them.

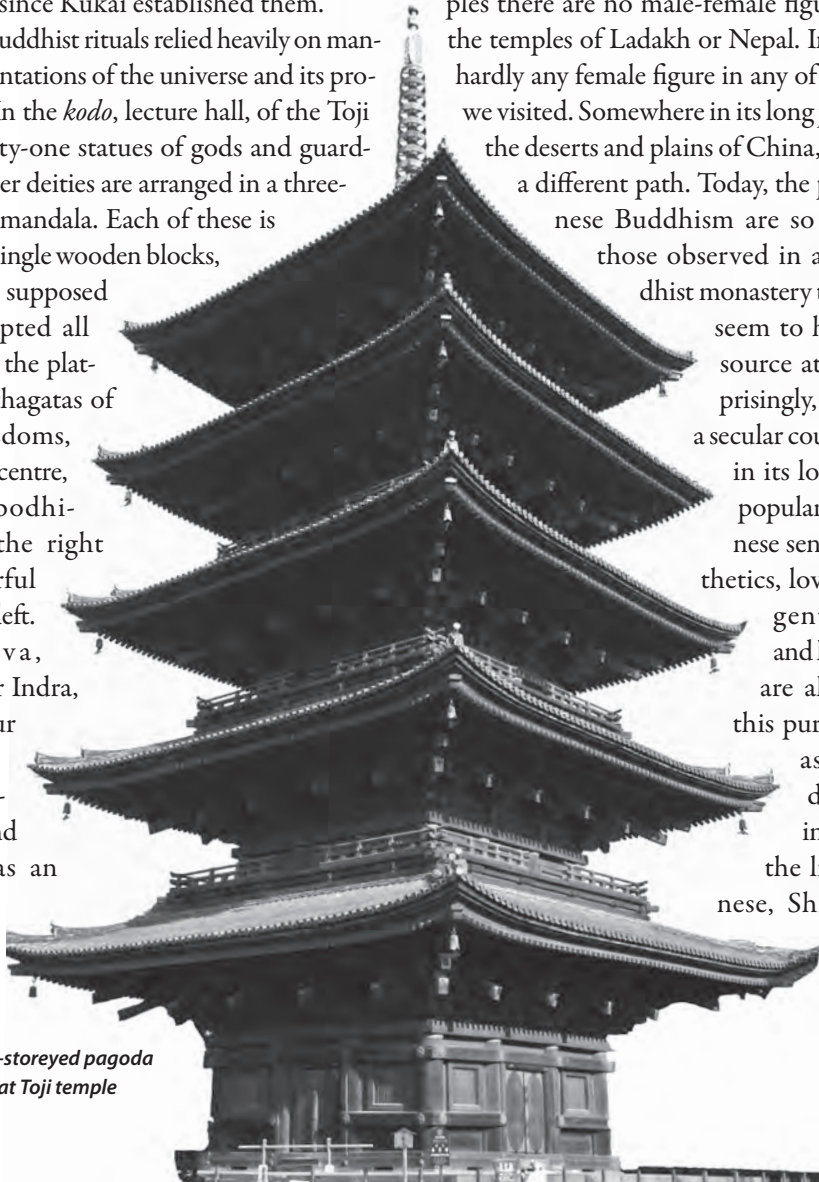
Esoteric Buddhist rituals relied heavily on mandalas, representations of the universe and its protector gods. In the *kodo*, lecture hall, of the Toji temple twenty-one statues of gods and guardian doorkeeper deities are arranged in a three-dimensional mandala. Each of these is carved from single wooden blocks, and Kukai is supposed to have sculpted all of them. On the platform are Tathagatas of the five wisdoms, placed in the centre, with five bodhisattvas on the right and five fearful kings on the left. Brahma deva, Sakrodeva or Indra, and the four guardian kings are arranged around them. It was an interesting experience to see images of

Indra and Brahma in a Buddhist temple in Japan, and that too nearly 1,300 years old.

Kukai lived in the hall called Mieido. There is an image of Fu-do in the hall; Kukai used to pray to him for the welfare of all people every day. At Toji there are three building complexes with many gods. We spent the evening in the garden by the beautiful pond. Someone had started a ritual with fire that looked somewhat like a yajna. Nothing except the fire was clearly visible in the dark *kodo*. We stood outside for some time and were then asked to leave. The temple complex was already closed.

Though the esoteric Shingon-shu is allied to tantric Buddhism, the images of heavenly beings in the two systems are very different. In the Japanese temples there are no male-female figures as found in the temples of Ladakh or Nepal. In fact, there was hardly any female figure in any of the monasteries we visited. Somewhere in its long journey through the deserts and plains of China, Buddhism took a different path. Today, the practices of Japanese Buddhism are so different from those observed in any Indian Buddhist monastery that these do not

seem to have a common source at first sight. Surprisingly, though Japan is a secular country, Buddhism in its local form is very popular there. The Japanese sense of natural aesthetics, love of cleanliness, gentle behaviour, and keenness to serve are all derived from this pure religion. And as long as Buddhism plays an important role in the lives of the Japanese, Shingon-shu will continue to have special relevance. 



# Swami Brahmananda

## Swami Prabhavananda

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

**A**FTER A FATHER OR MOTHER DIES, the sons and daughters are supposed to observe the occasion by cooking their own meal. In one pot rice, dal—lentil—and any vegetables are cooked together. You are not to sleep on a bed, but on straw. The idea is to pray and live a very pure life, think of God, and pray for the departed soul. Maharaj had said, 'You don't have to do anything, you are a brahmacharin.' Again he said, 'Take prasad from the Jagannath temple.' Then he said, 'Take my prasad.' So I was there for three or four days and suddenly Maharaj looked at me and said, 'Why are you here? Go to your mother.' He bought the ticket and sent his secretary to put me in the car with food from the Jagannath temple. When I arrived home my mother and brothers and sisters said to me, 'Something happened. As soon as you came, our grief was turned into joy.' All grief was gone. It became a festive occasion. Maharaj must have sent something through me. That is my belief.

When I came back to Belur Math, Swami Premananda wanted me to remain as an assistant to Swami Saradananda and to learn the job of a secretary. He told me, 'We are getting old. You boys have to conduct the whole work. So stay with Swami Saradananda.' I agreed. And then I got a letter from Maharaj asking me to come to him immediately. I told Swami Premananda and he said to me, 'Write to Maharaj that you won't go.' I said, 'I can't do that.' Then he said, 'What! You won't obey me?' I said,

'When it comes to obeying Maharaj and obeying you, I have to obey Maharaj.' Then—you see, his love was so great—he got excited and said, 'Get away from me! I can't look at you!' I went and bought some shoes, and when I came back, somebody said, 'Go upstairs. He is waiting for you.' Swami Premananda gave me some sweets and water and then asked, 'Are you mad at me?' I said, 'Why should I be mad at you?' 'Well, I scolded you.' 'But, Maharaj,' I said, 'your scolding is a blessing.' And really I always felt that way. He then said, 'Don't tell Maharaj that I scolded you. You see, this is the last you will see of me.' And he added, 'Of course, I had some plans for you, but Maharaj has others, so go.'

As soon as I arrived at the feet of Maharaj, he asked me, 'How is brother Baburam?' I answered that he was sick and suffering. He said, 'Did he ask anything of you?' I answered, 'Yes, he asked for some of the Lord's bathwater from the temple.' Maharaj exclaimed, 'And you have kept quiet! Such a great soul asking for such a little thing and you kept quiet all this time?' He turned to his secretary to get the prasad water and to send it to him immediately. He said to me, 'Do you know how great he is? If he looks in one direction, that direction becomes purified.'

After I was at Puri for some time, he sent me to Madras. He always considered me not very intelligent, not very practical, so he used to take care of me in a very motherly way. He was sending me to Madras, but he said to his secretary that since it was a long way to go, I must break my journey at such-and-such a place. He wrote a letter to a disciple and asked him to arrange for my stay with him. One of the swamis said, 'But he came all the way from Mayavati alone!' Maharaj would not listen to such a thing,

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The text of this article has been collated by Ms Edith Tipple from eight lectures given by the author at the Vedanta centres of Hollywood and Santa Barbara between 1961 and 1975.

so it was arranged that I would break my journey at Kokanadah (present Kakinada) and stay at a disciple's home for three days. The Madras Mail does not stop at that railway station, so Maharaj wrote to this disciple, whose brother was a member of the Legislative Assembly. The brother sent a telegram to the governor, the governor sent a telegram to the superintendent of railways, and the Madras Mail had to stop for me. Later, it had to stop again to take me to Madras. I was the guest of some very rich people who had a special guest house. They engaged a cook especially for me because they knew I didn't eat hot food. They advised the cook not to use chillies, but even the morsel of food I took, cooked especially for me without chillies, burned from here to there!

### King of Kings

I'll tell you why Swami Brahmananda was called Maharaj, Raja Maharaj. While Sri Ramakrishna was lying on his deathbed, he organized the Ramakrishna Order. That was the time when all the young boys got together in order to serve their master. Sri Ramakrishna was training Swami Vivekananda to become the leader apostle, and during that period he said, 'Rakhal has the intelligence of a king to rule over a kingdom harmoniously.' So Swami Vivekananda came down and announced to all the disciples gathered together, 'From today, Rakhal is our raja, king.'

The great scientist Einstein read the life and teachings of Maharaj. One of our brother disciples went to visit him, and Einstein said, 'Maharaj emphasized meditation.' And this brother disciple said, 'Well, he talked about work also.' Then Einstein said, 'Well, look here, as Maharaj said very well, "You don't have to ask people to work, they will work anyway", but he emphasized meditation: meditate, meditate, meditate.'

Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'Look, Rakhal is Thakur's son, we are his disciples.' A special regard was given him by all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Once Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, bring me somebody who will be like myself, with whom I can talk, who can under-

stand me, who can talk to me.' The day before Rakhal came, Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of Sri Krishna dancing with a young boy. How sweet the vision was, how wonderful and beautiful! He went into samadhi. Before long, Rakhal came by boat. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw him, he recognized him as the companion of Krishna with whom he had danced in his vision, and also as the one who would be like himself—his spiritual son.

Maharaj was considered a *nitya-siddha*, ever-free. There were six disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who were considered ever-free souls—that is, not just ordinary human beings who attained to the knowledge of Brahman through struggle, but born with the knowledge of Brahman. They come in every age with the divine incarnation for the good of mankind. Some came with Christ, some with Buddha, some with Krishna, again some with Sri Ramakrishna—because there is one and the same God that incarnates in different ages, in different forms, and with different names. As such, the disciples are born with the knowledge of God as well. This is what Maharaj told me one day, 'I see everything as Brahman, God, playing in so many masks: thief, murderer, saint, holy man.' Everyone is God; one God in so many masks—the mask of a wicked man, the mask of a saint. That is why these great souls never look down on anybody.

We read in the Upanishads: 'Brahman is above, Brahman is below, Brahman is to the right, Brahman is to the left. Brahman before you, Brahman behind you. All is Brahman.' Maharaj said to me, 'When I am in that state, who am I to teach whom? Can God teach God?' He continued, 'I come down to this normal plane, and then I see your mistakes and I correct you.' But when he came down to the normal plane, it was not exactly normal; he was always living in God. In other words, he lived in two states. In one state he would see Brahman everywhere; he himself would be Brahman; that is the non-dualistic experience. In the lower state he would be a devotee of God; that is the dualistic attitude. I am going to tell you of this dualistic attitude.

When Maharaj was in Madras, he wanted to go to the headquarters, so he asked me to get an al-

manac and find an auspicious day for leaving. We young boys used to think that was superstitious. Anyway, I brought the almanac and he said, 'Find out between such-and-such dates which is the auspicious day to leave.' I began to laugh. He said, 'Hey, what's the matter with you, laughing like that?' I said, 'Well, Maharaj, you will look at the date and settle on one, but I know you are not going then.' And he said, 'What can I do? These people are pressing me all the time [to decide] when I shall go, so I have to satisfy them; but I don't do anything unless I get the direct order from God, unless I know the will of God.' I cross-examined him. I said, 'Do you mean to say that for everything you do, every moment, you ask the Lord, you see him? You know, we also may think intuitively that something is right and it is the will of God; is that what you do?' 'No.' 'Do you see him and talk to him, and he tells you everything?' He said, 'Yes.' Then I asked, 'Well, that you accepted us as your disciples, did the Lord tell you to do that?' He said, 'Yes.' Just think how I felt at the time—that the Lord knows about us through him! I often remember that.

After his *mahasamadhi*, the first monks' conference was held. There were many disciples of Sri Ramakrishna living then, and the younger swamis and brahmacharins gathered together. Swami Saradananda said, 'From now on, whatever we ask you to do, do not accept immediately, but reason it out. And if you think it is not right, come to us again and talk it over. While Maharaj was living, whatever he said, without any question we obeyed, all of us, because we knew that that was the will of God.'

One day, which was the special celebration of the Divine Mother, our monastery invited swamis and monks from many different orders to come and partake of the prasad. Maharaj had a special chair and I did not want anybody to sit on it; so I took it from the house and way out onto the lawn. I had it upside down. Suddenly, I saw an old monk sitting on the chair, so I ran to him and said, 'Oh, please, you cannot sit there. That's Maharaj's seat.' 'Oh, Maharaj won't mind.' Then I said, 'But I do. "I" mind!' He said, 'If I don't get up, what will you do?' I was get-

ting excited; I took his hand and lifted him up. He got up, smiling. Then I went to prepare seats for everyone and I got Maharaj's special chair. That is when he said, 'Oh, no, no, no, no; the same seat for everybody. There are two holy men here who are knowers of Brahman.' This old man was talking to Maharaj, and I was standing there. I couldn't follow what they said—they were speaking in Hindi—but I knew they were having a good laugh at my expense.

In Madras my master's disciplining of me went on for three months. I usually felt joy inside, but once I got a little tired and thought I'd just run away. So I came to bow down in the morning, and as I was backing out, he said, 'Come, sit down. Do you think you can run away from me? The Mother holds the child on her lap and spans it. The child cries, "Mother! Mother!"' Then he said, 'Our love is so deep we do not let you know how much we love you.'

### **A Joyous Presence**

Maharaj wanted to send me to live in Allahabad with another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vijnanananda. Maharaj told me that he was a knower of Brahman who kept himself in hiding and didn't let anybody know that he was great. To prove how great he was and what a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna he was, Maharaj told me a story: 'Do you know how greatly devoted to Sri Ramakrishna he is? I was visiting his ashrama and a young boy came and wanted instructions. I said, "I'm nobody here. There is the abbot, go to him." And so the boy went to Swami Vijnanananda, who said, "I am the abbot here, but look, he is the head of the whole organization. Go to him." The boy came back, and again I sent him to Swami Vijnanananda. Do you know what he did? He said, "Wait, I'll give you instruction." He went to his room, opened a trunk, and brought a photo of me. He gave it to the boy and said, "Every day before this photo pray to be guided, to be instructed. I don't know any higher teaching than that." Maharaj then said to me, "Do you see what a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna he is?" You see, there was no distinction in him as separate.

(Continued on page 502)

# ***The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta – X***

**Dr M Sivaramkrishna**

**W**HEN I BEGAN THIS SERIES of articles, I could hardly imagine that Ramakrishna-Vedanta would figure in the disciplines which are as varied as they are surprisingly incongruous. Incongruous in the sense that the contexts could be, for instance, even rigorously political and, often, polemical. Political ideologies, which may not always see eye to eye with the basic tenets of Ramakrishna-Vedanta, are often found taking support from, mainly, Swami Vivekananda's nationalist views. Similarly, we have references in books that are somewhat occult or teleological—but not, let me add quickly, intolerably arcane. Perhaps, all these affirm that the impact of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta movement is so pervasive that it can illumine almost every aspect of human consciousness in its splendorous vitality and variety. Apparent incongruity could be not just a context for *samanvaya*, synthesis, but *samarasya*, the functioning balance between two equally valid oppositions.

## ***The Indian Spirit***

In this regard, political discourses on Indian—specifically Hindu—nationalism see Swamiji as a key figure. But they differ depending on the attitude of the analyst towards religion. For many scholars, religion is slightly disconcerting and inevitably irritating by its persistent presence and resilience. This is the reason for their view of religion as full of 'romanticist notions'. Yet, the social implications of religious movements are taken seriously, marked by openness and at least a valid relevance. In an important study of democracy and Hindu nationalism in modern India Thomas Blom Hansen takes note of Swamiji's role and says: 'The recruitment of Indian culture as

spirituality into nationalist ideology became fully articulated in the writings of Swami Vivekananda.'<sup>1</sup>

Hansen's view of culture as spirituality—bypassing the word 'India'—is, if one is not mistaken, no longer a Hindu notion. It is increasingly being perceived as the common denominator of cultures and civilizations. But often it could also turn out to be an obsessive individualistic preoccupation, with indifference to social aspects as corollary. It is here that Hansen's remarks are notably balanced: 'Vivekananda believed that the real living spirituality which would reinvigorate the nation was to be found in the masses. He believed in education of the common man in order to make the masses realize their own potentials—not as a subversive political force, but as a self-confident cultural expression, the realization of the Indian spirit that ultimately would render politics and power obsolete' (ibid.).

Hansen suggests that in this respect 'Vivekananda developed Bankim's paternalism in a populist direction, and provided a base for later interpretations of both Gandhian and militant Hindu nationalist varieties' (ibid.). In other words, this is 'a step toward the transformation of Hinduism from a signifier of religious faith to one of nationalist ideology. To Vivekananda, one should see "man as God", and true worship consisted in work for social ends' (70). So far, in my view, Hansen is sensible and sound.

But when he suggests that the social orientations of spirituality, or religion, of Swamiji are a 'mediated version of Herderian axioms' and 'a vernacular version of Fichte's national citizen' (ibid.), he seems to intentionally ignore the 'presence' and role of Sri Ramakrishna behind Swamiji. It is this 'presence' that imbues social service with the dy-

namics of spirituality. If this is bypassed, one enters surely the blind spots of pure social sciences dissociated from their ethical and spiritual roots. What inevitably follows is the equation of power with pursuit of unchecked desire for enjoyment through financial empowerment. The recent recession is not rooted in economic reasons alone. The stories of financiers like Bernie Madoff show the travesty and tragedy that underlie the greed for money.

### **Celestial Influences**

The second area is almost a quantum leap: from the secular world of political analysis to the world of ‘celestial influences’. There is a massive study by Rodney Collin called *The Theory of Celestial Influence*, with the subtitle ‘Man, the Universe, and Cosmic Mystery’. Collin (1909–56) came under the influence of P D Ouspensky—by indirection of G I Gurdjieff, I suppose—whose teachings he studied with others, forming a group in Mexico.

The blurb describes the book as ‘lifting a ladder to heaven’ and adds: ‘In an exploration of the universe and man’s place in it that takes an account both of twentieth-century scientific discoveries and of traditional esoteric teachings, Rodney Collin concludes that the driving force behind everything is not procreation or survival, but expansion of awareness.’<sup>2</sup> This makes Collin seek reconciliation of many apparent contradictions such as ‘the rational and imaginative minds’ and our perception ‘of the external world and our inner selves’. In the process he sets out ‘questioning what sort of unified vision can be had by even the most brilliant physicist, philosopher or theologian, “while he still becomes angry at being short-changed, fails to notice when he irritates his wife, and in general remains subject to the daily blindness of the ordinary mind”’ (ibid.). Thus, this is not just a cerebral analysis of planetary and implied psychological influences on our behaviour, but the almost entire gamut of the quest for harmony and of the prophets who embodied it.

It is in this overall context that Sri Ramakrishna figures in this book. One interesting fact is that the Great Master’s life was coextensive with the life and

career of several remarkable persons of world stature. ‘In the year 1870,’ Rodney Collin notes, ‘Victor Hugo was 68, Hans Anderson 63, Tennyson 61, Whitman 51, Tolstoy and Ibsen 42, and Nietzsche 26. And all were in the full flood of creation. The presence of this group of poetic prophets in the West at one moment is of itself extraordinary’ (264).

Above all, adds Collin, ‘all were deeply religious, but in a new free manner, unconfined to any doctrine. All possessed a breadth and a grasp, an immensity of view of time and space, which the discoveries of the new age for the first time made possible.’ Collin makes a reference to Karl Marx also, who, he says, chose to read the past in terms of ‘economic motive’ and ‘class struggle’, but succeeded only in ‘replacing them with the lowest human motives of greed and violence’. Essentially, Marx’s dialectic ‘could only serve to degenerate it’ (265).

It is in this atmosphere that, ironically, ‘the poet-prophets’ of the time, ‘by their lack of attachment to one form, were enabled to release through the world a strong wind of tolerance and larger understanding’. Indeed ‘the embracing and reconciling of different forms and messages, *without destroying their individuality*, the parallel of what was made possible in the physical realm by the use of electromagnetic waves, is very characteristic of the new line of religious thought’ (266).

‘The celestial influence’, at this stage, is the Great Master. Collin notes Max Müller’s massive project of the *Sacred Books of the East*, launched in 1876, and Madame Blavatsky’s foundation of the Theosophical Society. Clinching the process comes Sri Ramakrishna: ‘The one great contemporary religious figure in the East, Ramakrishna, between 1865 and 1875 practised one after the other, not only all the rites of different Hindu sects, but also those of Islam and Christianity, with the aim of reaching by these different paths the same transcendental goal’ (ibid.).

There are, in Collin’s analysis, several aspects that help one interested in the Ramakrishna-Vedanta phenomenon to have a more extended, comprehensive approach. It seems that this phenomenon is not just ‘Indian Renaissance’ but a renaissance coextensive

with and intensely relevant to a globalized world. It is tempting to fall into the fatal pit of regarding this as merely the pious inane rhetoric of an exaggerated devotional upsurge. If that bog is filled with openness, one notices that the classic equation of 'woman and gold' is *not* one of gender, but a telling code for the two failings of our times: lust and greed. However, in Ramakrishna-Vedanta these are seen as tremendous motivating energies, the orientations of which are not as negative as they seem to be. The 'celestial' dimension helps us also to take a fresh look at the recurrent emergence of figures—'incarnations', if you are not allergic to this word—like Sri Ramakrishna, to restore the balance that, in Mother's play, is given violent tilts and oscillating variations.

There are many such insights in Rodney Collin that, I am sure, reward the most exacting standards of study of a very difficult subject.

### **The Bible of Hinduism**

As if inter-religious impact existed without question—to point it out to me at least—a book entitled *Bible of Hinduism* came to my notice. And why not? When Sri Ramakrishna's teachings are the *Gospel*, why not Hinduism itself be constitutive of the entire 'Bible' in spirit and tone? The author, Dr G M Ram, has had a distinguished career and has authored groundbreaking books on sociology. His academic assignments included terms at the Mississippi State University and the University of Reading; his publications include those put out by the International Library of Sociology, London. The *Bible of Hinduism* is a substantial study of more than five hundred pages that offers a comprehensive survey from the Vedas down to our own days. The emphasis of this study is on the 'moral and spiritual teachings' of the vast literature of Hinduism and of the unbroken line of saints, sages, and incarnations.

An interesting feature of Professor Ram's book is the parallel study of saints, sages, or incarnations and the institutions which came into existence in the wake of their advent. In this scheme the Ramakrishna Mission has a prominent place. Commenting on the continuity of the ancient and the acceptance

of the modern, he says: 'The Ramakrishna Mission stands for religious and social reform but takes its inspiration from the ancient culture of India'<sup>3</sup>—this is a needed corrective to some other extreme views about the inspiration behind the Mission's institutional history. Another aspect he comments upon is the eclectic nature of the movement: 'It holds up the pure Vedantic doctrine as its ideal and aims at the development of [the] highest spirituality inherent in man, but at [the] same time, it recognises the value and utility of later development[s] in Hinduism, such as the worship of images' (ibid.).

Pointing to the authenticity of this, Professor Ram says: 'Ramakrishna demonstrated in his own life not only the compatibility of the worship of the goddess Kali with the highest spiritual life, but even something more than that, viz., that the worship of the image may be utilized as an excellent means of developing the highest spiritual fervour in man' (ibid.). Moreover, in Professor Ram's view, Ramakrishna 'laid his finger on the real source of abuse in present-day Hinduism, viz., mistaking the external ritual for the essential spirit, the symbol for the real' (ibid.).

This is an interesting observation about images evoking, through worship, the highest spiritual life and their usefulness in developing the highest spiritual fervour. Does the distinction suggest jnana and bhakti, or is it a comprehensive spiritual life in which all the paths are blended, or is it exclusively about the devotional path? This may appear to be a hair-splitting distinction; to me, however, it does not, as a clue seems to have been provided in Professor Ram's views on the 'characteristic features' of the Ramakrishna Mission.

In addition to the ideals of plurality of faiths, the 'success of the Mission in and outside India', is due to two reasons: 'It has no aggressive proselytizing zeal. It has no desire to develop into a separate sect ... and chooses to remain as a purely monastic order, disseminating reforming ideas among the masses without violently uprooting them from their social and religious environments' (ibid.). This explains the 'spiritual life' motif mentioned above. In this

paradigm one can retain one's spiritual life intact and not wrench oneself away from it.

The second aspect, as pointed out by Professor Ram, is that the Mission 'has put in the fore-front of its programme, the idea of social service not as a mere philanthropic work but as an essential discipline for religious and spiritual life'; and, 'in particular, the uplift of the dumb millions of India forms the chief plank of the Mission platform' (399). This requires the  *fervour*, the intense emotional identity with the destitute, the downtrodden. Without empathy roused in oneself by a life of the spirit, service becomes, in most cases, the enormous bloating of the ego.

Finally, Professor Ram suggests something related to this ideal of service. Swamiji 'believed', he says, 'that the present warring world can be saved by spiritual teachings which India alone imparts, but before she can do this, she must enjoy the respect of other nations by raising her own status' (ibid.). This is a very pertinent insight, but there is a rider here which needs some thought. What does 'raising the status' imply?


In the present scenario, globalization means mostly concentration of wealth, empowerment for consumerism, and privileging professions which are technological and medical. In India, human behavioural sciences are virtually neglected. The youth easily adapt to the lifestyles that are—if it is not a pejorative word—Western, urban, and affluent. In the mingling of cultures, the positives rarely come through. Yes, there are pockets of excellence alongside awfully neglected centres which lack even basic amenities. The situations are so uneven that no generalizations are possible with regard to the Indian context.

### Love Finds the Way

Let us conclude by noting the quintessential quality of Ramakrishna-Vedanta as observed by James Hewitt. In his reader-friendly teach-yourself book on meditation, he cites Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. In the chapter 'Love Finds the Way' he says: 'Hinduism contains within its elastic bound-

aries—if indeed, it can be said to have boundaries at all—polytheism and monotheism, pantheism, deism, theism, atheism. With the characteristic openness of Hinduism, Bhakti devotion is quite willing to include the Buddha and Christ among the incarnations worthy of worship. Hinduism is generous in such matters: there are no doctrinal rigidities.'<sup>4</sup> And the exemplar in this regard is the Great Master.

'This openness', he says, 'is well expressed in the teachings of Ramakrishna ... one of the great figures of the Bhakti school. He believed that devotion was the best path for the modern age. ... He pronounced that all religions are paths to one Truth. "It is one and the same avatar who has plunged into the ocean of life and appears now as Krishna, now as Christ. Avatars—such as Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Christ are related to the whole ocean." He also said: "I have found all religions—Hinduism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity—and I have found that all by different roads seek the same God"' (146). And 'Swami Vivekananda', says James Hewitt, 'taught the synthesis of Yogas and brought Advaita Vedanta to America' (147).

There is one aspect of 'openness' that needs careful thought. It can be used to study Hindu saints and sages and the texts from perspectives which are inherently allergic to religion. And these perspectives are, right now, focused on tantra, which can always be read from psychopathological views intrinsic to materialistic paradigms. Should openness be taken as the fundamental right to read texts insensitively? 

### References

1. Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford, 2004), 69.
2. Rodney Collin, *The Theory of Celestial Influence: Man, the Universe, and Cosmic Mystery* (Arkana: Penguin, 1954), blurb.
3. G M Ram, *Bible of Hinduism: A Gospel of Social Reconstruction* (New Delhi: Allied, 1985), 398.
4. James Hewitt, *Meditation* (Seven Oaks, Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993), 146.

# Vedanta-sara

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

## 37. Iyaṁ samaṣṭir-utkr̥ṣṭopādhitayā viśuddha-sattva-pradhānā.

*This aggregate (of ignorance) on account of its appearing associated with perfection (the pure intelligence of Brahman) has a preponderance of pure sattva.*

THE REALITY together with individual ignorance is called 'jiva'. The Reality together with cosmic ignorance is called 'Ishvara'. The substratum is the same, but due to different relations, *upādhis*, two different names—jiva and Ishvara—are given. Even the collective and individual ignorance are one and the same, but due to different 'relations' they are technically given two names for convenience.

Actually, ignorance is not a substance. It is a false notion, which cannot have size or divisions. There is neither the world nor 'you', 'we', 'I'. Yet, due to ignorance they appear as true. When there is no jiva, how can the collection of jivas possibly be? You think you will do good to the world. But when there is no world, how can you do good to it!

## 38. Etad-upahitaṁ caitanyaṁ sarvajñatva- sarveśvaratva-sarvaniyantr̥tvādi- guṇakam-avyaktam-antaryāmi jagat-kāraṇam-īśvara iti ca vyapadiśyate sakalājñānāvabhāsakatvāt 'Yaḥ sarvajñaḥ sarva-vit' iti śruteḥ.

The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda's classes on *Vedanta-sara*, conducted between 8 December 1954 and 20 January 1955. The notes—taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur—have been edited and reconstructed by Swami Brahmeshananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh.

*Consciousness associated with this is endowed with such qualities as omniscience, universal lordship, all controlling power, and the like, and is designated as 'the indescribable', 'the inner guide', 'the cause of the world', and 'Ishvara' on account of its being the illuminator of the aggregate of ignorance, as in the Shruti passage, 'Who knows all (generally), who perceives all (particularly)' (Mundaka Upanishad, 1.1.9).*

When the Reality manifests as jiva, the expression of its power too is limited; when the same Reality manifests through cosmic ignorance, the expressions of its lila are different. That Reality becomes *sarveśvara*, the lord of all; *sarvaniyantr̥tā*, the controller of all; *avyakta*, indescribable; *antaryāmi*, the inner guide or controller from within; *jagat-kāraṇa*, the very cause of the universe, since the consciousness in Ishvara, God, is without limitation and all pervading; it is *śuddha-sattva*, of the nature of pure *sattva*.

*Upahita-caitanya*: What is an *upādhi* or 'superimposing entity'? We can understand this with the help of a rose and a crystal. In the presence of a red rose the crystal appears red. Similarly, due to the presence of ignorance overlying your consciousness, your reality appears as, 'I am this, I am that'. Your fake notion is projected on the Reality. This personal false notion is called *upādhi*.

When the whole world, the collective cosmic ignorance, is the *upādhi*, limiting adjunct, the Reality or Consciousness is called *sarvajña*, 'all-knowing'. All individuals exist collectively in God. The *līlā-śakti*, God's power, is playing in every creature. Thinking, reasoning, the body and mind of every individual—all this is only the manifestation of the power of the same Ishvara. He is the God of all, *sarveśvara*.

He is *avyakta*, indescribable, since his manifestations are infinite. Whatever is there in the world, it is all his. You cannot put any limit to it; and since description implies limitations, he cannot be described. He is *jagat-kāraṇa*; he is the cause of all. He is the first seed of the whole world. Just as in the seed the leaves, flowers, stems, branches, fruits are involved, similarly in the collective maya, Hiranyagarbha, Virat, and jivas are involved. That very seed manifests first as Hiranyagarbha, the subtle universe, then as Virat, the gross universe, and later as jivas, creatures. This further evolves into the individual 'I', the ego of creatures that manifests as 'I', 'we', 'father', 'mother', and the like. Ishvara is nothing but the Reality expressed collectively.

The fundamental reality of jiva and Ishvara is the same: *ekamevādvitīyam*. The difference is only in the lila, the manifestation: in jiva it is finite, in Ishvara it is infinite. When an aspirant attains to God-consciousness through spiritual practice, then in his consciousness such differences as father, mother, I, we, and the rest remain no more. He experiences God in all; there are no more limited expressions for him. Everything appears as the expression of God's lila. He realizes the power of the cosmic Reality, attains all-pervasiveness, and his individual ignorance and ego disappear.

We must always remember the origin, the ultimate cause of the manifestation, the universal. The cause is the absolute Reality, the one without a second, Brahman. It created—or projected—out of its own self, through its *līlā-śakti*, *māyā-śakti*, *ajñāna*, primal ignorance. This original *māyā-śakti*, the undifferentiated maya, is called the *samaṣṭi ajñāna*. It is like the saliva in the mouth of the spider which has not yet started projecting the web. Or it is like the sperm or ovum in which all parts of a physical body are potentially present but not yet manifest. This Brahman plus the original maya is Ishvara. In the next stage this Ishvara further evolves into the comprehensive invisible universe, in a subtle form, just like the eight-celled embryo. In this stage the Reality is called Hiranyagarbha. This Reality further evolves into the com-

prehensive gross universe, which is called Virat. The Reality abiding in all these stages is the same, but its names are different.

Always think of the *vyaṣṭi*, the individual in the context of the universal. You, creatures, the world, all are expressions of God's lila. You are merely the product of God's maya. Thus, all this diversity, this subject-object consciousness, is constituted merely of forms that have evolved out of God's maya. When we remember this, we are not deluded by *jīva-jagat*, creation and creatures.

Although the ultimate Reality in jiva and Ishvara is the same, there is a difference in manifestation between the two; and if we are to realize the identity between the two—the ultimate Reality—the difference has to be eliminated.

Although *māyā-śakti* is present in both the jiva and Ishvara, jiva is influenced by it. The jiva is beset by passions, egotism, anger, hatred, and the like; but Ishvara is not affected by *māyā-śakti*. Ishvara is *māyādhīśa*, the controller of maya. Jiva is *māyā-yukta*, tied by maya; Ishvara is *māyā-mukta*, free from maya. Sri Ramakrishna gave the example of a cobra, which has poison inside; though the cobra is not affected by the poison, it can kill others. In the jiva there is the *nikṛṣṭa upādhi*, inferior adjunct, of 'I and mine'. In Ishvara there is *utkrṣṭa upādhi*, superior adjunct—characterized by omniscience and such other qualities—and there is no subject-object consciousness. The magician deludes people with his magic, but he himself is never deluded by his own magic. You too must remove the *nikṛṣṭa upādhi* through spiritual practice. Then there will be no subject-object consciousness and its reactions, and Brahman-consciousness will manifest within you.

In Ishvara-consciousness, although there is the consciousness of the one without a second, the subject-object consciousness remains suppressed—a state analogous to deep sleep, *suṣupti*. But in *nirvikalpa samādhi* there is no subject-object consciousness at all, neither manifest nor suppressed.

The realization of Brahman depends upon an 'all-sided' illumination. Due to emotions, the ordinary

realization is partial and temporary. The aspirant should understand that due to the connection with father, mother, and the like attachment remains. Hence, bondage persists and there is no liberation. The world continues to affect the mind of the aspirant and he suffers birth after birth. First of all, the aspirant has to realize that he holds the wrong notion that the world is real. This is called the knowledge of ignorance. Sadananda says that your subject-object consciousness is unreal. This knowledge leads to transcendence. The conviction that the apparent reality of the world is born of ignorance leads to calmness of mind, and then the truth flashes from within.

From the positive standpoint, this world and you are the effects, and Brahman-consciousness is the cause. You will realize that you are not, that only Brahman is. The reality in father, mother, me, and you is Brahman alone. Without Brahman nothing can exist. The reality in the jiva is Brahman. All existence, expressions of power, guiding principles—all these have come from the consciousness of Brahman. As a matter of fact, there is nothing called ‘you,’ ‘I,’ ‘we.’ God alone is appearing in all these contexts. People are not able to surrender to God because they don’t feel they are zeros, nobodies. The wise person is always humble and without pride, as he knows that there is but one consciousness, and ‘I,’ ‘we,’ ‘you,’ and the like do not exist.

*(To be continued)*

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*(Continued from page 495)*

Once Maharaj had to sign a document. After three or four days his private secretary said, ‘Maharaj, this is the last day. I have to give that document back. Please sign it.’ Maharaj said, ‘I get confused about my name, what to sign.’ You see, he was so identified with Sri Ramakrishna.

There is a prayer written by Shankaracharya to the guru. In that prayer he describes the guru and how the guru teaches his disciples. In one of the verses he says that the guru is seated under a tree

in silence. The disciples are seated around him in silence. The guru is young; the disciples are old. Doubts are being dispersed; knowledge, wisdom, is dawning in them, and their hearts are becoming filled with the bliss of the presence of God. The guru is young, because the truth that is eternal is ever young. The disciples are old, because doubts and superstitions, the karmas of many, many past lives, are old. But all doubts are dispersed, knowledge dawns, hearts become filled with bliss of the presence of God.

This fact I have witnessed in the life of my master. He would remain seated silently, his disciples seated around him. Sometimes he would speak, but not of God. He would make fun, cut jokes, and make us laugh. And then again there would be silence, complete silence. As you went out of the room, all doubts had gone; all problems had suddenly been solved. This I witnessed from day to day: that in his presence he made us feel that the realization of God is not only the goal of life, but it is also so easy, as if God were the fruit in the palm of our hands. We could feel that.

Another great characteristic I have witnessed is that wherever he would go—he used to go from one monastery to another, and stay for some months in each monastery—there would be festivity. All the time it would be full of joy. Whoever entered within a certain orbit would feel that joy, as if on a festive occasion. Even when Maharaj would chastise us with harsh words, thundering at us, even then there would be a current of joy inside us.

Once a professor from Colombo came to visit our monastery. After one week he said, ‘I can’t stand the atmosphere anymore. I want a little worldly atmosphere. I don’t know what kind of people you are, you boys, but if you can stand him from day to day like this, you must be great!’ The fact is, I came to him as an adolescent. I tried to think lustful thoughts and I couldn’t. Lust and greed, such ideas would not arise in your mind, such was his power. Of course, these are rare souls.

*(To be continued)*

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



## **Tattvabodha—Volume II**

Ed. Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty

National Mission for Manuscripts—Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, and Munshiram Manoharlal, Post Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055. 2008. Website: [www.mrmlbooks.com](http://www.mrmlbooks.com). x + 194 pp. Rs 350.

Since there is God's plenty in Indian culture, no book of essays on any aspect of India's past can ever be enough. *Tattvabodha—Volume II* is rich in every way. T N Dharmadhikari's opening essay on a Vedic phrase, *devasya kāvyam*, is an instance. Have we not had plenty of interpretations of the Vedas? Yet, there is always space for more; and Dharmadhikari points out some of the intuitive flashes in the *riks* that have a bearing on the origin of the Vedas. In them we have an attempt by humans to realize the eternal Truth, the immutable Brahman. The instrument for the purpose is the divine sound, *divyā vāk*.

'The *Sādhaka* in his deep meditation loses his own identity, he ceases to be himself and becomes one with the divine spirit and as if follows the orders of his inner divine inspiration. If he speaks, he speaks as is directed by the divine inspiration, i.e., divine being uses him as a flute as by a fluteplayer. This appears to be the concept behind *apauruṣeyatva*. This appears to be the origin of "*devasya kāvyam*" (11).

The other essays adventure into various realms. M A Lakshmithathachar explains how intense research in the Sanskrit language has been made possible by information technology. Another Sanskrit-centric essay comes from Ashok Aklujkar, who laments the fall in standards of editing Sanskrit texts but refers to the happy presence of digital printing. There are then the differences between the western and Indian practices of editing texts. Aklujkar's guidelines are very clear and would be of immense value if brought to the notice of the academic and publishing world dealing with Sanskrit publications.

Devangana Desai's 'Kūrma Symbolism in Indian Art and Myth' reveals the existence of two Kurma Satakams that have been inscribed in full on stone by

King Bhojadeva—11th century CE—of the Paramara dynasty. The priceless value of Tibetan manuscripts to Buddhist studies is the subject chosen by Laxman S Thakur, and S R Sarma presents a revelatory essay on Indian astronomical instruments. These three articles are accompanied by sheaves of excellent photographs as well.

The Guru Granth Sahib, the *Gita Govinda*, and the *Chitrasutra* are among other subjects that make the book a fascinating collection. Manihar Singh explores various Manipuri manuscripts to trace the evolution of Vaishnavism. The subject is spellbinding. The cult started with the gift of a gold icon of Vishnu by the Pong King Khekhompha to Meitei King Kyamba in the fifteen century. By the eighteenth century the Radha-Krishna cult had grown strong in Manipur. Presently, the Ramayana was retold in Manipuri by Kshema Singh Moiramba. There was even an intriguing time of mutual rivalry between the followers of Rama and Krishna! It is amazing how religion has been an inspiration for some of the finest flights of devotional poetry in Manipuri. There was also a Tulsidas here, whose compendium *Vaishnav Vyavahar Nirnay* draws a good deal from Rupa Goswami's *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*. In fact, the whole of this great land is a treasure-house of *devasya kāvyam*! Despite its highly intellectual parameters, *Tattvabodha* is easy to read, rich in icons for meditation, and often bears us along into the wide spaces of spiritual enlightenment. Truly a jewel for one's personal collection.

Dr Prema Nandakumar  
Researcher and Literary Critic  
Srirangam

## BOOK RECEIVED



## **Physics Metaphysics**

M K Prabhakaran Nair

T C 4/157, Mangalya, PO Kowdiyar, Thiruvananthapuram 695 003. E-mail: [mkprabhakaran\\_nair@yahoo.com](mailto:mkprabhakaran_nair@yahoo.com). 2007. 79 pp. Rs 80.

# REPORTS



*Educational service in rural areas  
by Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor*



## News from Branch Centres

**Nippon Vedanta Kyokai**, Vedanta Society of Japan, organized the concluding phase of its golden jubilee celebrations from 26 to 30 May 2010 with an exhibition, a public meeting, and a cultural programme. Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and several other dignitaries addressed the meeting, which was attended by about 600 persons.

On 8 June **Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor**, started distributing notebooks, stationery, and other study materials to school children of government primary and high schools situated in remote or backward villages as part of its annual educational service activities in rural areas. This year, about 14,000 students from Pavagada, Madhugiri, Chintamani, Kolar, Hoskote, and Kanakapura taluks are being benefited by this project.

**Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, conducted a three-day all-Tamil Nadu youth retreat from 8 to 10 June, in which 225 young men participated.

A newly constructed wing of the higher secondary school building at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunjee**, was inaugurated by Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 11 June.

## Achievements

The school at **Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Viveknagar**, was awarded the Champion's Trophy by the Centre for Excellence in Academics (CEA), New Delhi, for the commendable performance of its students in the 2nd All-India Maths Science Talent Examination 2009 conducted by the CEA. Besides, the following higher secondary students

of the centre secured 1st, 3rd, 6th, 8th, 9th, and 13th ranks in the North-eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology Entrance Examination 2010: Satadeep Das, Indrajit Pal, Subhadeep Chakraborty, Diptasankha Roy Choudhury, Arghyadeep Dhar, and Arindam Roy.


Pallab Chakraborty, Habung Moda, Tilling Tapin, and Chau Athina Chauhai, students of the school at **Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar**, secured the 1st, 3rd, 4th, and 5th positions in the Arunachal Pradesh Joint Entrance Examination, while Miling Pertin of the same school secured the 1st position in the All India Engineering Entrance Examination (Architect.) 2010.

Susnata Mandal and Saikat Chakraborty, both students of the school at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Medinipur**, obtained the 3rd and 18th ranks in the West Bengal Joint Engineering Entrance Examination 2010.

## Relief

**Flood Relief** • On 19 June **Karimganj** centre distributed 5,000 kg rice, 50 kg dal, 18 l mustard oil, and 100 packets of candles to 90 families affected by a recent flood in Bazarghat block of Karimganj district.

**Distress Relief** • The following centres distributed various items to the needy: **Madurai**: 6,641 notebooks; **Rahara**: 235 sets of school uniforms, 75 textbooks, and 940 books on value education.

**Flood Rehabilitation** • After rendering primary relief services to the victims of the October 2009 flood, **Belgaum** centre has undertaken the construction of 299 houses in Belgaum and Raichur districts to rehabilitate the victims. Till June 2010 the centre had erected 55 houses up to the plinth level, 35 to the lintel level, and 35 to the roof level. 



**JUST RELEASED**

***VOLUME IV***  
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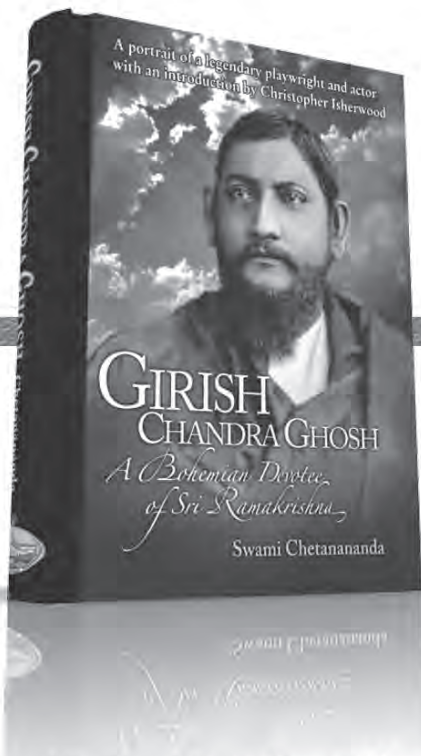


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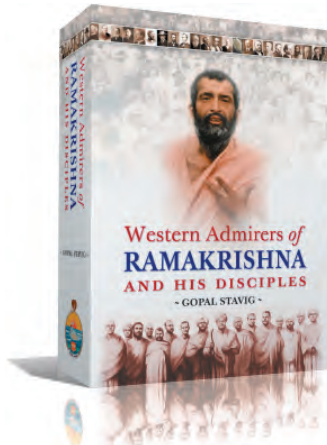
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